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# **‘COMMUNITY’: THE ENDS AND MEANS OF SUSTAINABILITY?**

*Exploring the position and influence of community-led initiatives  
in encouraging more sustainable lifestyles  
in remote rural Scotland*

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*A thesis presented for the degree of*  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Edinburgh

2015

# Declaration

This thesis has been composed wholly by me, Emily Creamer, and is my own original work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signature:

Date:

# Abstract

This research explored the role of community-led initiatives in encouraging the uptake of more sustainable lifestyles within the social and physical context of remote rural Scotland. Participant observation with Arlen Eco Trust (AET) and Thriving Thornton (TT), two community-led sustainability initiatives funded by the Scottish Government's Climate Challenge Fund (CCF), led to findings which challenge the common assumption that funding for community-led initiatives will be of net benefit at the local level.

In line with the requirements of the CCF, both AET and TT define community in terms of geography. However, only a small minority of the members of the geographically-defined communities of Arlen and Thornton were found to be actively involved in the groups' activities or objectives. Both Arlen and Thornton were observed to be segmented into multiple and diverse 'communities within communities' and, rather than representing 'the community', AET and TT can more accurately be understood as an example of sub-communities in themselves.

This sub-division within the communities was found to be exacerbated by the fact that both the governance and management of AET and TT were observed to be undertaken primarily by individuals regarded as 'incomers' to Arlen and Thornton, which resulted in an 'incomer' identity being passed on to the group and its activities. Historic connotations with 'incomers' as disruptive to traditional ways of life were found to resonate with the suspicion and scepticism expressed by some 'locals' wary of 'incomer' groups that were actively trying to change local lifestyles.

The groups' ability to engage with the wider geographic community was also observed to be further weakened in several ways by the receipt of government grant funding. The short timescales and expected outputs associated with many funding schemes were found to be discordant with the long-term sustainability goals of the community groups studied, and participation in top-down funding programmes was found to reduce the time and resources available for 'hands on' community participation activities. Furthermore, the need for groups to adapt their ambitions and approach to align with top-down demands from funders is incongruent with the notion of a 'community-led' initiative.

Together, these local conditions were found to have significant implications with respect to the impact and influence of AET and TT. The funding received by the groups was found to create pockets of social capital – rather than being distributed through the geographic community – which served to strengthen the group, but segment the wider population, implying that, rather than increasing local social sustainability, schemes such as the CCF may be undermining it.

Overall, this thesis concludes that, whilst the CCF was observed to facilitate community as a means by which to reduce carbon emissions, 'community' was not being strengthened as a policy end. As such, it questions whether current mechanisms of central government funding for isolated, self-identified community-led groups to deliver finite, output-driven projects will inherently help to empower geographic communities to adopt more sustainable lifestyles.

# Acknowledgements

There are a huge number of friends, colleagues, and acquaintances who have made a contribution to this project. I am not able to name all of these people here, but I hope that they know who they are and know that I am enormously grateful.

My biggest debt of gratitude is to the residents of my two case study communities and to everyone who shared their stories with me. This thesis is a product of their cooperation and collaboration, and it is my earnest hope that all those whose words and actions I have reported here believe they have been represented fairly and honestly.

This research was made possible by funding from the UK Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), and the Scottish Government as part of the Sustainable Lifestyles Research Group (SLRG). I am grateful to Tim Jackson and Ian Christie at the University of Surrey for their expert guidance and leadership of the SLRG. I always came away from our meetings encouraged and enthused, and I feel very fortunate to have been part of such a friendly and vibrant group of researchers.

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For their implicit and unconditional support in everything that I do, my mother, brother, and sister must always take significant credit: in this case, particularly Floss. Without her encouragement and generosity, from beginning to end, I can't imagine how I would have got here. I am lucky, and extremely grateful, to have her as my sister.

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*This above all: to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.*

*William Shakespeare (1601)  
'Hamlet': act 1, scene 3*

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# Abbreviations

AET	Arlen Eco Trust
CARES	Community and Renewable Energy Scheme
CCF	Climate Challenge Fund
CO <sub>2</sub> e	Carbon dioxide equivalent
DECC	Department for Energy and Climate Change
Defra	Department for Food and Rural Affairs
FoT	Focus on Thornton
KSB	Keep Scotland Beautiful
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PM	Project Manager
SLRG	Sustainable Lifestyles Research Group
SNH	Scottish Natural Heritage
SNP	Scottish National Party
TT	Thriving Thornton
TTN	Transition Town Network
WCED	World Conference on the Environment and Development

# PART I

– *Setting the scene* –

# 1 Introduction

*“Left to their own devices, it seems, there is not much hope that people will spontaneously behave sustainably... But it is a mistake to assume that evolutionary motivations are all selfish... the balance between selfish and cooperative behaviours depends critically on the kind of society they occur in”*

Tim Jackson (2008: 55)

Context is everything. As Tim Jackson states above, a person’s behaviour depends critically upon the nature of the society in which they live. It therefore follows that any attempt to encourage more sustainable lifestyles must acknowledge, and account for, the influence of local context (Stern, 2000; Blake, 2001; Burningham and O’Brien, 2003; Clark *et al*, 2003; Lorenzoni *et al*, 2007; Steg and Vlek, 2009; Marquart-Pyatt, 2012). As such, I began this research project with the aim of better understanding how the context of remote rural Scottish communities affects the uptake of more sustainable lifestyles by the people living within them.

By undertaking participant-observation with Arlen Eco Trust (AET) and Thriving Thornton (TT)<sup>1</sup> – two community-led projects financed primarily through the Scottish Government’s Climate Challenge Fund (CCF) to reduce carbon emissions locally – the influence of government-funded, community-led initiatives on sustainable lifestyles in remote rural Scotland has been analysed and examined in a rare level of detail, generating a first-hand account of the micro-scale socio-political intricacies and nuances of community-led action in this context.

Overall, this thesis challenges the common assumption that current mechanisms of government funding for community-led initiatives will inherently help strengthen ‘community’, even in remote rural locations, where traditional bonds of community are often assumed to be most clearly manifest (Woods, 2005). Findings demonstrate that, whilst targeted support for self-identified, ‘community-led’ organisations is likely to

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<sup>1</sup> As discussed later in this chapter (Section 1.5: p.11), pseudonyms are used throughout this thesis to protect the confidentiality of participants.

strengthen the social capital within that particular group (at least temporarily), this may serve to exacerbate existing divisions within the (geographically-defined) community as a whole and, in turn, act to prevent – rather than encourage – more widespread local engagement.

I begin the main body of this chapter by sketching out the fundamental rationale for my research, and the research group to which it contributes. Following this, I present and explain the research questions that this thesis seeks to answer, briefly outline the ethical implications of my chosen methodology, and explain my approach to the ‘essentially contested’ terms of reference central to this research. I finish the chapter with an overview of the structure of the remainder of this thesis.

## 1.1 Project rationale

This PhD is one of 11 allied research projects making up the Sustainable Lifestyles Research Group (SLRG), a cross-disciplinary collaboration between five UK institutions. The SLRG was established “to develop new and relevant understandings of the processes which lead to changes in people’s lifestyles, behaviours and practices; and to offer evidence-based advice to policy-makers about realistic strategies to encourage more sustainable lifestyles” (SLRG, no date: para.1). It was founded upon the belief that a better understanding of the processes which influence lifestyle choices is of critical importance in the search for solutions to “the biggest dilemma of our times: reconciling our aspirations for the good life with the constraints of a finite planet” (Jackson, 2009: 3).

The preliminary outline of the research project had already been articulated within the original SLRG project specification when it was granted funding, which set certain parameters prior to my involvement. Therefore, in order to provide the rationale for this PhD, it is useful to briefly explain the rationale behind the SLRG.

### *1.1.1 Sustainable lifestyles*

In the centuries since the emergence and subsequent globalisation of capitalist aspirations, the world population has burgeoned at an unprecedented pace, amplifying rates of resource use around the globe. This, coupled with the intrinsic desire of free-market capitalism for perpetual growth, has resulted in the world economy expanding at

such a rate that, across large parts of the globe, the Earth's natural carrying capacity is becoming overwhelmed (Li, 2009). Anthropogenic climate change, arguably one of the world's greatest challenges (Poortinga *et al*, 2011), serves as a stark indicator of the potentially devastating consequences of 'business as usual' on natural global systems. In response to this threat, both the Scottish and UK governments have committed to an 80 per cent reduction in national greenhouse gas emissions (against 1990 baseline levels) by 2050 (Climate Change Act 2008; Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009), making effective strategies for climate change mitigation a priority within national policymaking.

If it is accepted that unsustainable patterns of consumption are a key factor in the degradation of natural capital, and that modern lifestyles embody unsustainable consumption patterns – both in terms of the resources they require and the harmful emissions and waste they produce (Druckman and Jackson, 2010) – then it follows that changes in lifestyles are required in order to help mitigate environmental damage and safeguard natural resources for the future (Evans, 2010). Encouraging pro-environmental behaviour is therefore considered to be a central component in achieving a sustainable future (McKenzie-Mohr, 2000), cited as “the most practical way forward and likely to be the most cost effective” (Barr *et al*, 2006: 2).

Policies which focus on engaging the public with climate change issues and facilitating pro-environmental behaviour choices are commonly considered more socially – and politically – acceptable than top-down regulation (Whitmarsh and O'Neill, 2010). However, the complexity of this ambition is enormous. Behaviours not only vary between different populations (such as those divided geographically), but also between individuals within populations (for example, with age, gender, or vocation), as well as varying within a single individual at different times and in different contexts, particularly as they transition through various phases of their lives (Brown *et al*, 2011).

As discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, the findings from the behaviour change literature demonstrate that there is a highly diverse set of competing and collaborating factors influencing the uptake of various pro-environmental behaviours. It is evident that motivators for making 'green' choices are often not grounded in environmental concern (Hallin, 1995), with evidence to suggest that pro-environmental action is more likely to be linked to personal financial or health benefits than to a concern for issues such as climate change (Whitmarsh, 2009). To add further complexity, 'lifestyles' are

not single behaviours but are assemblages of inter-related social practices (Evans and Abrahamse, 2009), and a person's lifestyle is arguably best understood as the product of a complex interplay between their individual, social, and material contexts (Darnton and Horne, 2013; Shove and Walker, 2010). Therefore, efforts to encourage sustainable living “must be seen in the context of an holistic move towards new lifestyles, incorporating purchase-related and habitual elements that cross conventional behavioural boundaries” (Gilg *et al.*, 2005: 503).

Despite the fact that discourses of ‘sustainable lifestyles’ are becoming increasingly prevalent in policy and practice, relatively little research has been conducted that takes the holistic approach required. The majority of the research related to sustainable lifestyles that has been conducted to date has largely focused on behaviours in and around the home (Barr *et al.*, 2011), evaluating the factors influencing specific behaviours and the effectiveness of interventions to encourage pro-environmental choices (Evans and Abrahamse, 2009). There is a lack of research which has explored the way in which various behaviours interact across various ‘sites of practice’ to construct a narrative of sustainable living in a more general sense (Barr *et al.*, 2011; Hallin, 1995).

Consequently, this PhD project was conceived as an opportunity to explore how the various countervailing forces within the bounds of a particular community influence and interact with the sustainability of lifestyles in these locations. The following subsection provides the rationale behind the decision to focus on remote rural Scotland as the site of investigation.

### ***1.1.2 Remote rural Scotland***

The world population has recently shifted, for the first time in history, to be more concentrated in urban areas than rural areas (Sonnino, 2009). The hegemony of capitalist ideals across global politics has resulted in large cities becoming national symbols of wealth and material aspiration (Paul, 2004), where “urban living and the quality of urban life, culture and environment have been increasingly recognised as cornerstones of a civilised and progressive society” (Parkinson and Boddy, 2004: 1). Promoting and protecting cities as drivers of economic growth has risen up the UK policy agenda in recent years (Parkinson and Boddy, 2004) and this focus is inevitably translated into research agendas. With the majority of people now living in cities, it follows that the ‘typical’ lifestyle is an urban one, and much recent research related to

sustainable living has focused on defining and exploring the concept of “sustainable cities” (e.g. Janssens *et al*, 2009; Coaffee, 2008; Newton, 2008).

However, the need to envision and establish sustainable cities does not negate the need to counterbalance this with understanding the meaning and embodiment of sustainable lifestyles in rural communities. Despite the fact that urban populations now outnumber rural populations, in many countries, including Scotland, rural areas still account for a significant portion of the population, and the vast majority of the land area (Bergmann *et al.*, 2008). Of the research that has been conducted into the translation of global environmental issues in rural spaces, most has focussed on assessing the potential physical impacts of major environmental change (particularly global warming) on rural communities, and their capacity to adapt to these changes (e.g. Marsden, 2009). There is a distinct lack of research which explores how the individuals living in remote rural communities might fit into national and international transitions towards more sustainable ways of living.

According to the Scottish Government’s definition of rurality<sup>2</sup>, 94% of Scotland’s land mass and 18% of its population is classified as rural, with 6% of the population inhabiting *remote* rural areas, which make up 69% of the country (Scottish Government, 2011a). Remote rural communities are found from the southern lowlands of the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway, to the Highland communities on the most northerly mainland peninsular, including 100,000 people scattered over 94 inhabited Scottish islands (Fleming, 2003). Therefore, not only does Scotland provide an ideal location in which to study remote rural living, but understanding the factors influencing lifestyles in these communities is of significant value to the Scottish Government if it is to design effective sustainability strategies for all parts of the country and all portions of the population.

Whilst the methodology of the project was not pre-designed, an overall objective of the research from its inception was to gather a more holistic understanding of remote rural lifestyles, with a focus on directly observing local enactments of sustainable living. Consequently, I elected to conduct ethnographic case studies of remote rural

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<sup>2</sup> Rural areas are defined as all those with populations of fewer than 3,000 people, and *remote* rural areas are rural populations with a drive time of over 30 minutes to the nearest settlement with a population of 10,000 or more (Scottish Government, 2012a)



communities in Scotland which were actively attempting to facilitate more sustainable lifestyles through grassroots action.

The decision to select field sites with an active community-led sustainability initiative was largely a pragmatic one. I was aware of the CCF, a specific scheme established by the Scottish Government to encourage community-led low-carbon projects across Scotland, and so volunteering to participate in some of these projects appeared an ideal way to gain access to remote rural communities in which individuals were actively seeking to live more sustainable lifestyles. However, as will become clear as the thesis progresses, this methodological decision was unexpectedly pivotal in determining the focus of my research towards the interplay between top-down and bottom-up expectations and ambitions for the projects I studied.

## 1.2 Research aim

Based on the rationale presented in Section 1.1, this PhD had the following – purposefully broad – research aim:

*To better understand how community-led initiatives are encouraging a transition towards more sustainable lifestyles within remote rural communities in Scotland*

As explained in more detail in Chapter Four, in seeking to meet this aim, I employed what can be described as a “general inductive approach” (Thomas, 2006: 238), following an “emergent design” process (Morgan, 2008: 245). Whilst my methodology did not adhere to the traditional doctrine of Glaser and Strauss (1967) for the discovery of grounded theory, I did draw on its central concepts to inform my approach. Of most significance in terms of the generation of my research questions – and perhaps most contentiously – I chose to follow the original advice of Glaser and Strauss to “ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study” prior to entering the field (1967: 37).

The full rationale for this decision is discussed in Section 4.3 (p.68), but, in essence, reflects my desire for an ethnographic experience, in which I could enter and observe remote rural communities as free as possible of any preconceived notions of what I would experience, and allow the unexpected to emerge:

*“...the beauty and mystery of the ethnographer’s quest is to find the unexpected stories, the stories that challenge our theories. Isn’t that the reason why we still go to the field – even as we question where the field is located – in the 21st century? We go to find the stories we didn’t know we were looking for in the first place.”*

Behar (2003: 16)

Of course, as Cutcliffe (2000: 1480) states, “no potential researcher is an empty vessel” as previous academic endeavours are likely to have contributed to the researcher’s existing background knowledge in the chosen field of study. Having just completed MSc research on pro-environmental behaviour change, this was certainly true in my case. Furthermore, during the early design stages of the PhD, I supplemented this existing knowledge with some selective reading in order to provide the basic conceptual framework from which to start my observations (Cutcliffe, 2000). However, I consciously avoided conducting a comprehensive review of the existing literature on sustainable lifestyles in remote rural Scottish communities before beginning my fieldwork. One consequence of taking this approach was that it was only once data collection had begun that explicit research questions began to emerge and were refined over time in light of my ongoing observations and analysis.

Research questions are crucial in any research endeavour: they force the researcher to articulate the particular gap in the current understanding that findings hope to answer, and help to define the theoretical and practical approach taken to a piece of research. However, that is not to say that narrow research questions should be tightly and rigidly defined prior to starting fieldwork. Research questions should be allowed to remain fluid until the very end of the research process: “Every phase of the research offers opportunities to reconsider, reformulate and refine the research question... question work is sometimes only resolved when the question, and answers, come together at the end of the research” (Green, 2008: 60).

My fieldwork generated three distinct research questions. In what follows, I will briefly outline the process through which these questions were formulated.

### 1.3 Research questions

I entered the field aware of the substantial weight of academic and political literature endorsing the efficacy of community-level action to encourage and facilitate more

sustainable lifestyles locally (e.g. McKenzie-Mohr, 2000; Church and Elster, 2002; Holland, 2004; Peters and Jackson, 2008; Connors and McDonald, 2010; Heiskanen *et al*, 2010; Middlemiss, 2011a, 2011b; Connelly *et al*, 2011) and aware that remote rural locations are commonly assumed to have a stronger sense of community than many of their urban counterparts (Obst *et al*, 2002; Crow, 2010). Both of the case studies chosen for my research were selected based on an assumption that the initiatives were expressions of a community's desire to come together to mitigate climate change and promote more sustainable lifestyles at the local level, and I expected that this would be translated into a high level of active participation in the CCF projects. Consequently, once in the field, I was surprised and intrigued to find that – beyond the groups' employees and Board members – only a small proportion of the populations were participating in, and benefiting from, the 'community-led' projects underway.

It was immediately apparent that 'community' was in fact heterogeneous, plural, and subjective in both case study locations, raising fundamental questions about the use of community as a vehicle for change. I began to consider how any policy which relies on 'community' as a central delivery mechanism necessitates a degree of interpretation in its various enactments. That is, policy to employ or promote 'community' is likely to be inconsistently understood and endorsed by the various agents involved in its delivery. Therefore, the first of the project's research questions explores the way in which 'community' is expressed at the local level:

- 1) *How is the concept of 'community' manifested within 'community-led' initiatives attempting to encourage more sustainable lifestyles in remote rural Scotland?*

The apparent lack of buy-in from 'the community' in 'community-led' activity raised the question of why these two initiatives were not able to capitalise more fully on the many reported benefits of a grassroots approach. In my pursuit of this line of investigation, one of the most striking observations was the dominant influence of 'incomers' in setting up and managing both the groups studied. Based on these observations, the second research question examines how these identities interact with the identity of the community groups and with the groups' position within the community:

2) *How are ‘incomer’ and ‘local’ identities reflected within community-led initiatives attempting to encourage more sustainable lifestyles in remote rural Scotland?*

Having recognised the prevalence of ‘incomers’ in both the case study groups, I began to question why this might be the case. Alongside the identification of some inherent cultural differences between stereotypical ‘incomers’ and ‘locals’, I began to note a number of the elements within the format and practice of the funding scheme itself which served to hinder, rather than facilitate, wider community engagement and participation in the groups’ activities. This led to the articulation of the third and final research question:

3) *What influence do top-down grant funding schemes have on community-led initiatives attempting to encourage more sustainable lifestyles in remote rural Scotland?*

The explorations of these three questions together form the backbone of my thesis, and provide a novel contribution to the current understanding of the position and influence of community-led initiatives in encouraging more sustainable lifestyles in remote rural Scotland.

## 1.4 Terms of reference

As will become increasingly apparent as this thesis progresses, a number of the concepts that are fundamental to this research can be considered to be “essentially contested concepts” (Gallie, 1956: 167). This is not unusual in social science research, where conceptual confusion has long been a source of difficulty in theory and empirical analysis (Collier *et al*, 2006). ‘Sustainability’ and ‘community’, probably the two principal terms of reference throughout this research, can both be considered, not only contestable, but inherently irresolvable, due to “differing ‘conceptions of the concept’ – legitimate, yet incompatible and contested, interpretations of how the concept should be put into practice” (Connelly, 2007: 262). Consequently, it is not feasible to neatly define either ‘sustainability’ or ‘community’ in this introductory text as both require much more extensive discussions. These discussions are presented in Chapter Two and Chapter Five respectively.

## 1.5 Ethics and anonymity

This research was carried out in line with the guiding principles of research ethics and integrity determined by the School of Geosciences at the University of Edinburgh. In meeting these ethical obligations, researchers are required to demonstrate respect for both the free and informed consent from research participants, and the privacy and confidentiality of research participants, as well as minimise any negative impact or possible risks of the research on the participants (University of Edinburgh, 2011).

In order to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of participants, the names of all places, people, and institutions included in this thesis, including the names of Arlen Eco Trust (AET) and Thriving Thornton (TT), are pseudonyms. I have also altered a number of insignificant details to prevent the locations or members of the groups from being identified beyond doubt (Murphy and Dingwall, 2001).

However, participant-observation is a particularly ethically contentious method with regard to gaining free and informed consent (Dewalt and Dewalt, 2002). This is not due to any intention to deceive participants, but is inherent in the nature of the method, as Atkinson (2009: 21) explains:

*“...the nature of the research itself is so profoundly an emergent property of the process of data collection and research design, that are themselves emergent unfolding processes, that it becomes all but impossible to solicit consent to the research that is ‘informed’ in the sense of being predictable and explicable before the research itself is carried out at all.”*

In the case of my research, participant-observation was conducted overtly in both fieldwork locations. As will be explained in Chapter Four, the full details of my research were disclosed in interviews conducted with the managers of both case study projects during pilot study visits to each site. Therefore, the Project Manager (PM) was able to give their consent to the research aims and methods on behalf of the community groups prior to the start of the fieldwork. Once in the field, I was introduced, or introduced myself, to other members of the community group as a PhD researcher, and I was forthcoming with the specifics of my methodology.

Over time, I felt that a degree of trust and friendship naturally built up between me and the members of the groups, and the frank and honest information and insights gathered this way was a fundamental reason for selecting an ethnographic approach. However, this also blurred the boundaries between a point of view consciously being divulged to a

researcher and a private remark being shared with a friend. As Dewalt and Dewalt (2002: 198) note, “Even if a fieldworker makes it clear that he/she will ‘write a book’ or report on his/her experiences, informants may not realize that what they share as ‘gossip’ during informal conversations may form part of this report”. Furthermore, because I shared an office with the groups’ employees, I regularly observed, and sometimes participated in, interactions with non-participant members of the wider community who were not always aware of my research. It was therefore not always feasible to gain formal consent from all the people I encountered. Therefore, while these types of encounters do not make a particularly significant direct contribution to the thesis, I have made a conscious effort to exclude any observations that may harm or compromise any individual encountered during fieldwork.

## 1.6 Thesis structure

As discussed in section 1.2, and more extensively in Chapter Four, I consciously elected to enter the field prior to consulting the full body of existing evidence and theory on community-led sustainability initiatives in remote rural Scotland. In line with a grounded theory approach, rather than predetermining the specific focus of my investigation prior to beginning fieldwork based on the existing literature, my focus was guided by my empirical observations in the field. As fieldwork progressed, observations led to hypotheses which directed me towards a deep engagement with new literatures and disciplines that I would never have expected at the outset. Therefore, this thesis is structured in a way intended to reflect the inductive approach taken and the iterative process of observation and analysis which led to the research findings, with the relevant literatures introduced and integrated into each chapter as the thesis progresses.

The literature review presented in Chapter Two reflects the existing knowledge on pro-environmental behaviour and sustainable lifestyles with which I began my observations, and which guided me towards my research aim. I begin the chapter by mapping the origins of ‘sustainability’ as a political ambition, discussing emergence of the inherently slippery notion of ‘sustainable development’ as a core component of UK policymaking, and the increasing emphasis on encouraging pro-environmental behaviour as part of this strategy. I then move on to examine the evolution of theories and models of behaviour change that have emerged in the literature, highlighting the ways in which this literature

has informed the current policy focus on encouraging ‘sustainable lifestyles’, and discussing the potential role of community-level action in bridging the gap between individual behaviours and wider societal transitions.

In Chapter Three, I present the ‘research context’, which aims to provide the reader sufficient information to understand the historical and political context within which this research fits. In the first section, I provide an overview of the CCF, including the background to its arrival as a flagship Scottish Government policy, and the findings of a 2011 evaluation of the scheme. Following this, in the second part of chapter, I introduce and outline my geographical area of study, remote rural Scotland, discussing the definition of rurality, before providing a brief history of rural Scotland, and an explanation of why remote rural Scotland is of particular interest within the context of sustainability.

In Chapter Four, I provide the details of my methodological approach. The first section of this chapter outlines and explains the epistemological and ontological roots of my methodology, which provides the rationale behind the decision to conduct participant-observation within a case study framework. Following this, I describe the practical details of my chosen methods, including brief profiles of the two case studies, Arlen Eco Trust and Thriving Thornton.

In Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, I present my research findings, with each chapter speaking to one of three central research questions described in section 1.2.

Chapter Five discusses the role of community in sustainability policy. I begin by briefly tracing the origins of ‘community’ as a unit of governance in UK politics, discussing the influence of the neoliberal rationale of Thatcher’s Conservative government, and subsequently New Labour’s Third Way, in establishing ‘community’ as the language of responsible citizenship. Leading on from this, I examine the way in which ‘community’ is framed and employed within the Scottish Government’s Climate Challenge Fund, and the translation of this at the local level. Within this discussion, I explain how and why community is currently being employed as both the *ends* and the *means* of sustainability policy, a subtle distinction that is often lost in the application and analysis of community in this context. I compare this framing of ‘community’ in policy with the reality of ‘community’ observed in my two case studies, arguing that, whilst the geographically-defined community which ostensibly ‘leads’ these projects, may be the means by which

the carbon reductions are being achieved, there is a lack of evidence that the same community is being strengthened and empowered by the projects. I therefore suggest that the CCF is in fact acting as a catalyst for the creation and empowerment of a new sub-community.

In Chapter Six, I move on to discuss who it is that makes up these new sub-communities created by the CCF projects. I provide evidence from the two case studies to demonstrate that both CCF groups were led primarily by those considered ‘incomers’ in each community, and discuss how, whilst ignored in current policy, this specific sub-division can complicate, and even undermine, “community-led” climate change action.

In Chapter Seven, my findings reveal how the format and requirements of the CCF can negatively influence the ability of community-led initiatives to mobilise the geographic community more widely. Specifically, the short timescales, administration demands, and local competition encouraged by the CCF were observed to negatively impact both the groups studied. These observations were strongly supported by evidence from semi-structured interviews held with directors and managers of seven additional community-led initiatives across rural Scotland with experience of funding sources beyond the CCF. Based on these findings, I argue that, whilst local carbon emissions savings may be achieved, it cannot be assumed that funding schemes such as the CCF facilitate a long-term move towards more sustainable lifestyles throughout the community in which they operate.<sup>3</sup>

I pull these three strands of analysis together in Chapter Eight, where I present a discussion of my findings as a whole, and fully entrench my observations and analysis within the existing theoretical and empirical landscape. Here my findings are demonstrated to be supported by a diverse body of literature which problematizes the use of community in policy. Drawing the concept of ‘government through community’ (Rose, 1996) introduced in Chapter Five, it becomes clear that the problems identified with the CCF are intrinsic problems of government-controlled ‘community-led’ initiatives. Namely, where government defines the communities that are most deserving of funding and support, communities seeking funding must adopt government-prescribed values and measures of worth. As such, I argue that the CCF, rather than

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<sup>3</sup> An edited version of this chapter has recently been published as a journal article in *Local Environment* (Creamer, 2014).



supporting existing communities, creates new communities-within-communities which conform to the top-down model and have a self-selecting membership. Instead of strengthening local relationships, the CCF is arguably therefore creating pockets of social capital which may in fact segment the geographic community further.

In conclusion, in Chapter Nine, I reflect on the evolution of the thesis and highlight three specific contributions that this research has made. First, the novel analysis of the role of community as the ends and means of sustainability policy has elucidated the potential for these roles to contradict, rather than complement, one another. Second, by connecting the previously identified tendency for community-led sustainability initiatives to disproportionately attract the ‘civic core’ (Mohan, 2011; Aiken, 2012) with the observation that the two groups studied were dominated by ‘incomers’, I have provided new insights into the ways in which community-led sustainability initiatives can unevenly engage the members of remote rural communities. Third, I have provided substantial empirical evidence of the ways in which the receipt of grant funding through a major funding scheme may hinder participation in community-level initiatives. In this chapter, I also reflect on the ethnographic methods employed, and the limitations of the findings presented. I end by suggesting possible avenues for future research which could build upon this thesis and help further illuminate the position and influence of community-led initiatives in facilitating more sustainable lifestyles.

## 2 Sustainable lifestyles: a literature review

*"We stand now where two roads diverge. But unlike the roads in Robert Frost's familiar poem, they are not equally fair. The road we have long been travelling is deceptively easy, a smooth super-highway on which we progress with great speed, but at its end lies disaster. The other fork of the road – the one 'less travelled by' – offers our last, our only chance to reach a destination that assures the preservation of the earth."*

Rachel Carson (1962: 240)  
'Silent Spring'

This chapter, divided into three main sections, reviews the existing literature on sustainable lifestyles. As identified in the previous chapter (p.10), 'sustainability' can be considered to be an 'essentially contested concept' and, as such, in the first section of this chapter, I briefly present my own understandings and interpretations of this largely subjective and intractable concept with the aim of establishing the terms of reference for this thesis. I argue that, although often recognised as a weakness, the malleability of the meaning of 'sustainable development' should also be considered a strength, allowing it to be translated at different scales and different contexts, and facilitating its acceptance across all sectors of society. I discuss how sustainable development has evolved within UK and Scottish Government policy, and the increasing emphasis on the role of the individual in moving towards more 'pro-environmental' behaviours.

In the second section of the chapter, I examine the theories and models of behaviour and behaviour change that can be seen to have the most significant influence on current policy seeking to encourage more sustainable ways of living. This section demonstrates the complexity of trying to disentangle the many internal and external factors which interact to influence the various behaviours that aggregate to form a person's lifestyle.

Finally, drawing on the various theories presented in the previous section, I conclude this chapter by examining how the community level has come to be seen by many as an effective site at which to engender pro-environmental behaviours. Not only the scale, but also the specific social organisation embodied by 'the community', has been

identified as having particular potential as a tool by which to influence both internal and external factors to facilitate more sustainable lifestyles.

## 2.1 The rise of sustainability

The natural ecosystems of the planet provide for human existence both in terms of their capacity to supply the resources necessary to support life ('sources'), but also in their capacity to absorb the impacts of human activity ('sinks') (Jackson, 2009). However, the relationship between individuals and the natural ecosystems they depend upon is thought to be weakening, reflected in the way in which people conduct their lives (Chambers, 2008).

### 2.1.1 *Unsustainable lifestyles*

The current global hegemony of free-market capitalism means that, at a national and international level, human activities pivot around maximising the production and consumption of goods and services in order to fuel economies and generate continual GDP growth, an ambition that is necessarily embodied in the lifestyles of the individuals living within these societies (Hallin, 1995). As the exponential increases in material exchange over recent years have exerted – and continue to exert – unprecedented pressure on these sources and sinks worldwide (Jackson, 2009), present global ecological problems have been repeatedly attributed to the dominance of 'an anthropogenic worldview', which is, "the idea that humans are the measure of all value, and the earth and its natural resources are valuable insofar as they satisfy human needs" (Scott and Willits, 1994: 239).

One increasingly evident consequence of this pressure is the impact on the global climate system. From 1906 to 2005, average global temperatures rose by 0.74°C, with an associated rise in average sea level of approximately 1.8 mm per year since 1961, and a 2.7% decrease in annual average Arctic sea ice cover per decade (Solomon *et al.*, 2007). These observations have been convincingly linked to the anthropogenic modification of the earth's energy balance as a result of increased concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere since the industrial revolution.

A rising awareness of the negative influence of human activity on natural systems stimulated the 'ecological revolution' of the latter half of the twentieth century. A major

catalyst for this is often cited as Rachel Carson's 1962 publication, *Silent Spring*, in which she highlights the extensive pollution caused by pesticide use, and the potential damage to natural systems, including animal and human health (Creech, 2012). Carson also forcibly attacked the supposition that the human race could, or should, take control of the environment in order to meet anthropogenic needs and desires (Sessions, 1987) and this, alongside a number of similarly high-impact publications (such as *The Population Bomb* (Ehrlich, 1968) and *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows *et al.*, 1972)) which quickly followed, was considered a turning point in understanding the interactions between economic, social, and environmental processes on the earth (Creech, 2012).

From the 1960s onwards, the concept of environmental sustainability steadily gained increasing presence in academic literature (Adams, 2006). However, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the political focus regarding human-induced environmental issues was centred on tackling relatively small-scale, local issues such as acid rain, air pollution and waste, and it was not until the 1990s that more systemic problems, such as climate change and global resource depletion, reached the mainstream political agenda (Geels, 2010).

### **2.1.2 'Sustainable development'?**

The crescendo in general public awareness and concern regarding issues of 'sustainability', specifically, is usually identified as originating from the publication of the United Nations World Commission on the Environment and Development (WCED) Report, *Our Common Future*, in 1987. This is credited with being the first publication to formally define and use the term 'sustainable development' (Johnston *et al.*, 2007), stating it to be "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). Commonly referred to as the 'Brundtland definition' after Gro Brundtland, the chairperson of the WCED at the time, this definition, and the overall message of the report, recognises a need, and a desire, to view development from a holistic perspective, accounting for the costs and benefits to all aspects of human existence; economic, social, and environmental (Vallance *et al.*, 2011).

Whilst the words of the WCED are still regularly cited as the classic definition of sustainable development, they have also received significant criticism. Termed a "political fudge" (Richardson, 1997: 43), the Brundtland definition is frequently

denigrated for its vagueness and lack of explicit meaning (Adams, 2006), as Beckerman states:

*“...such a criterion is totally useless since ‘needs’ are a subjective concept. People at different points in time, or in different income levels, or with different cultural or national backgrounds, will differ with respect to what ‘needs’ they regard as important. Hence, the injunction to enable future generations to meet their needs does not provide any clear guidance as to what has to be preserved in order that future generations may do so.”*

Beckerman (1994: 194)

In Figure 2.1, Hopwood *et al* (2005) provide a broad conceptual framework for the trends within the sustainable development debate. By charting degree of concern for human well-being and equity on one axis and degree of environmental concern on another, the authors provide a useful illustration of the vast spectrum of views within the sustainable development discourse.

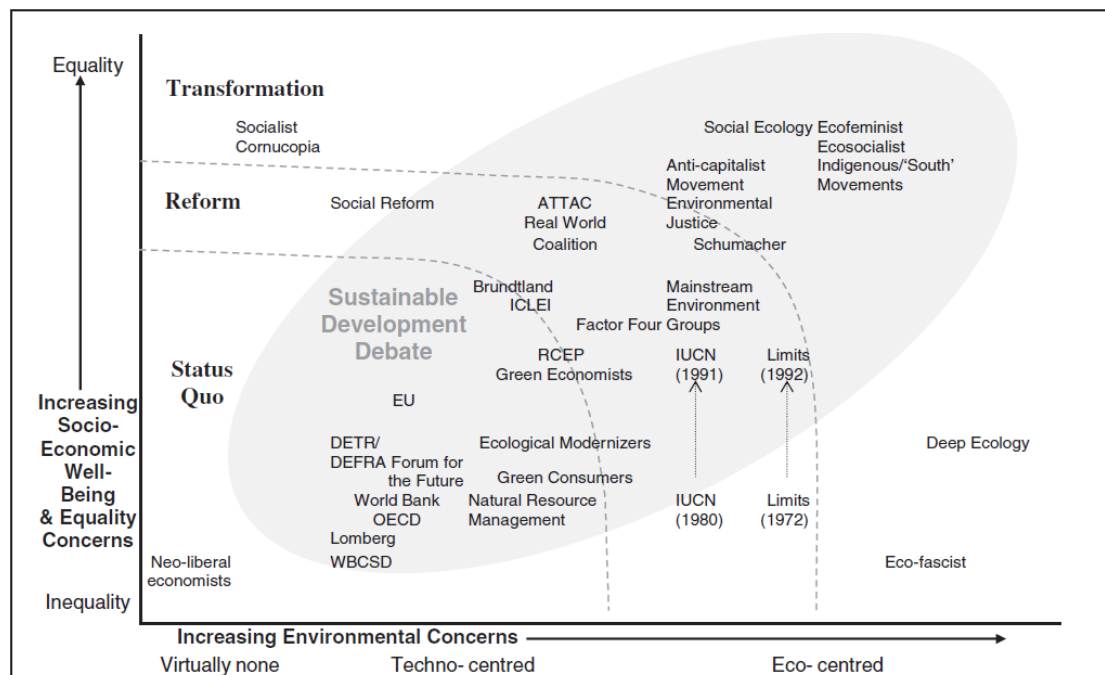


Figure 2.1: Mapping of views on sustainable development

Source: Hopwood *et al* (2005: 41)

As can be seen in the diagram, Hopwood *et al* (2005) overlaid their map with three broad views on the changes to current political and economic arrangements required to achieve sustainable development. These views range from ‘status quo’, where no changes are thought to be required, through ‘reform’, where some significant

adjustments are believed to be needed, to ‘transformation’, where current institutional arrangements are considered to be the root of the problem and, therefore, require radical transformation. Arguably, the identification of this wide spectrum of views supports argument that the WCED definition of sustainable development is “difficult or impossible to operationalize” (Marshall and Toffel, 2005: 673), with the danger that, due to the subjective nature of the terms of reference, various individuals and groups ostensibly intending to achieve ‘sustainable development’ are in fact pulling in different directions, dispersing and lessening the potential impact of coordinated collaboration.

It has been argued that the reason for such divergent views is that, in its attempts to reconcile the imperatives of growth and development with ecological sustainability, ‘sustainable development’ is, essentially, a contradiction in terms. When applied within a business or government context, there is an apparent inherent assumption that the notion of ‘sustainable development’ incorporates sustained economic growth, whilst within an academic and NGO context, human development is not necessarily considered to be coupled to an increasing GDP (Robinson, 2004). The past two decades have, therefore, seen numerous attempts at establishing an improved expression of the meanings of ‘sustainable development’ and ‘sustainability’ in various contexts. However, the prevailing result of these efforts has been to substantiate the view that the notion of sustainability itself – rather than the Brundtland definition per se – is inexplicit and pluralistic. The inherent degree of subjectivity in individuals’ perceptions resulting from their own system of societal values and the cultural contexts which they inhabit (Clifton, 2010) means that sustainability is an intrinsically “slippery concept” (Eden, 2000: 111), which will unavoidably be translated differently by different people (Johnston *et al.*, 2007).

In response to the previous criticism of the vagueness of sustainability, it can be argued that it is, in fact, this flexibility of meaning that makes it such a powerful and popular concept. As Parris and Kates (2003) state, “That the oxymoron-like character of sustainable development can be so inclusive must surely lie in its inherent ambiguity...” (p.560). By being open to a degree of interpretation, the fundamental notion of ‘sustainability’ is accessible to all actors at all levels in society, from individuals and communities, to businesses and governments. Sustainable development is a global-level concept. It cannot be, nor does it does it profess to be, a ‘one-size-fits-all’ or ‘silver

bullet' solution to all global problems. Instead, the fundamental basis of sustainable development – that future development needs to integrate long-term environmental, social, and economic concerns – can provide flexible guiding principles within which action can be tailored to the parameters of specific context in which it occurs (Kemp and Martens, 2007; Robinson, 2004). Therefore, embedded within the overarching global concept of sustainable development, increasingly bespoke interpretations can be made as the scale of operation reduces, for example, from global to national to regional to local to individual. As such, sustainable development has been embraced by policymakers across the world, arguably pioneered by successive UK governments.

### *2.1.3 The origins of UK sustainability policy*

The aforementioned WCED report, *Our Common Future*, provided guidance on how the WCED's concept of 'sustainable development' could be integrated into national policies and served as a catalyst for a rapid growth period in sustainability policy (Quental *et al*, 2011). Arguably the greatest achievement of *Our Common Future* was its success in highlighting and legitimising sustainability issues on the international stage, which laid crucial foundations for the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro (Waas *et al*, 2011). It has been reported that over 30,000 delegates, from 176 countries, attended the 1992 'Rio Earth Summit', including 103 Heads of State or Government (Freestone, 1994). As such, Waas *et al* (2011: 1642) suggest that the 1992 UNCED "represents the official worldwide political endorsement of sustainability as a new development model". During the conference, the terms of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) were negotiated, alongside the establishment of a set of 27 global sustainability principles, labelled 'The Rio Declaration', and agreement on a global action plan by which to achieve these principles, 'Agenda 21', with the latter subsequently described as the most substantial outcome of the summit (Tuxworth, 1996).

Despite the limited progress that has been made in many of its programme areas (UNDESA, 2012), Agenda 21 is still commonly considered to be "the most significant and influential non-binding instrument in the environmental field, serving as the blueprint for environmental management in most regions of the world" (UNEP, 2002: 17). As well as encouraging international, multi-stakeholder co-operation, Agenda 21 spurred national governments to establish and implement their own sustainability action

plans (Bond and Morrison-Saunders, 2011). The UK was one of the first countries to act, introducing its first national strategy on sustainable development in 1994 (HM Government, 2005).

The UK sustainability strategy has since been revised, first in 1999 ('A Better Quality of Life'), again in 2005 ('Securing the Future'), and, most recently, in 2011 ('Mainstreaming Sustainable Development') (Defra, 2011a, 2011b). These revisions reflect various national and international developments during this period, one most significant of which being the adoption of the UNFCCC Kyoto Protocol in 1997. By signing and ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, the UK formally committed to a reduction of national greenhouse gas emissions against the 1990 baseline (DECC, 2013), a commitment strengthened by the passing of the UK Climate Change Act in 2008, which established a legally binding agreement to achieve an 80% greenhouse gas emissions reduction by 2050 (HM Government, 2011).

In 1999, most of the key policy areas for sustainable development were devolved from Westminster to Holyrood as the new Scottish Government was formed (Jones, 2006), and, therefore, Scotland takes a largely autonomous approach to sustainability issues. In 2009, the Scottish Government passed its own Climate Change (Scotland) Act, which mirrored the UK's commitment to an 80% emissions reduction by 2050, and set an interim target of a 42% reduction by 2020. Sustainable development is stated to be "integral to the Scottish Government's overall purpose" (Scottish Government, 2013a: 13), manifested in the ambition to move towards a 'low carbon Scotland'. Both the UK and Scottish Government approaches to sustainability recognise and emphasize the importance of engaging individuals in achieving sustainable development, originally highlighted by Agenda 21 (Barr, 2003; Eden, 1996).

Private consumption is thought to be both directly and indirectly accountable for a significant, and growing, proportion of greenhouse gas emissions, and other damaging environmental impacts (Ölander and Thøgersen, 2014). As such, 'pro-environmental behaviour' and sustainable consumption have become increasingly important elements of policy (Hargreaves, 2011), particularly within climate change policy, where significant emphasis has been placed on individuals as the drivers of greenhouse gas reductions (Fudge and Peters, 2013).



Pro-environmental behaviour can be defined as “behavior that consciously seeks to minimize the negative impact of one’s actions on the natural and built world” (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002: 240). This incorporates the more specific concept of ‘sustainable consumption’, arguably emerging from Agenda 21, which called for an examination and revision of consumption patterns (Jackson and Michaelis, 2003). Although only loosely defined, much like sustainable development before it, ‘sustainable consumption’ has become a core national and international policy objective (Seyfang, 2006) as part of a general trend, within both policy and the market, towards acknowledging the increasing power of citizen-consumers in influencing shaping systems of production and consumption (Spaargaren, 2003).

In 2008, Defra published the report, ‘A Framework for Pro-environmental Behaviours’, which aimed to support policymaking to “protect and improve the environment by increasing the contribution from individual and community action” (Defra, 2008: 3). Similarly, the Scottish Government recently published ‘Low Carbon Scotland: A Behaviours Framework’ (Scottish Government, 2013b) which outlines how the government will “drive and support the move to low carbon living” (p.1). However, designing policy to encourage any form of behaviour change is notoriously difficult (Jackson, 2005). Not only are the factors controlling behaviour extremely complex, but policy interventions to modify behaviours are often resisted by civil society over fears of the creation of an over-controlling ‘nanny state’ (John *et al*, 2009).

Traditional policy interventions aimed at directly influencing behaviour typically rely on information campaigns, regulation, or market-based mechanisms (Moloney *et al*, 2010). However, these tactics have been criticised on a number of grounds, including ineffectiveness, costs of implementation, intrusiveness, and an inequitable distribution of costs (Lucas *et al*, 2008). Consequently, many governments, of differing ideologies, are pursuing various policies which seek to use the power of the state to encourage certain ‘pro-social’ behaviours *indirectly* (John *et al*, 2009). For example, in 2010, the UK Government formed the Behavioural Insight Team, a research unit within the Cabinet Office that is informally referred to as the ‘Nudge Unit’ due to its foundations in the theory described in the eponymous book ‘Nudge’ (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008). The central premise of nudge theory is that it is more effective to influence lifestyles indirectly through adjusting the factors which determine behavioural choices, than to

attempt to directly force certain behaviours using traditional approaches (Corner and Randall, 2011).

In the following section, I provide an overview of some of the major contributions within social-psychological behaviour change research which help to contextualise the current strategies within UK policymaking for encouraging more sustainable lifestyles.

## 2.2 Understanding (pro-environmental) behaviour

In order to encourage more sustainable lifestyles, policymakers need a fundamental understanding of the processes which influence behaviours. There is a vast body of work which has attempted to model these processes, and Table 2.1 gives an outline of the most influential models of individual behaviour that have been developed over the past sixty years. It is not possible, or of particular value to the thesis, to debate each and every one of these approaches in this section. Instead, I briefly discuss some of the key factors influencing behaviours that have been identified across these models, and discuss how these ideas have been incorporated into pro-environmental policymaking.

### *2.2.1 Information: knowledge-attitude-behaviour?*

Many behavioural models are founded on the economic theory of rational choice. Put simply, this theory asserts that an individual will assess a given set of options available to them, weigh up the costs and benefits of each possible course of action, and rationally choose the one which is judged as having the outcome most closely aligned with the individual's desired result (i.e. maximum utility) (Clark, 2010). For this model to function correctly, people are assumed to hold perfect information about the choices open to them and the costs and benefits of their decisions (Welsch and Kühling, 2010).

Based on this assumption, the earliest frameworks to explain the motivation to adopt or reject pro-environmental behaviours were founded on an 'information-deficit model' (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002). This essentially purports that individuals are prevented from making the 'correct', utility-maximising decision by a lack of knowledge. As such, environmental policymaking historically assumed that the failure to adopt pro-environmental behaviours could be attributed to the fact that "lay people do not grasp the scientific and rational reasoning behind policy debate" (Eden, 1996: 197).

Individual behaviour models	
1. <i>Behavioural Economics</i>	Bounded Rationality (Simon, 1955) Judgment Heuristics (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974) Prospect Theory (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979) System 1/System 2 Cognition (Stanovich and West, 2000)
2. <i>The Role of Information</i>	(Information) Deficit Models Awareness Interest Decision Action (AIDA)
3. <i>Values, Beliefs and Attitudes</i>	Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) Health Belief Model (Rosenstock, 1974) Protection Motivation Theory (Rogers, 1977) Schematic Causal Model of Environmental Concern (Stern <i>et al</i> , 1995) Values Beliefs Norms (VBN) Theory (Stern <i>et al</i> , 1999) Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion (ELM) (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) MODE Model (Fazio, 1986)
4. <i>Norms and Identity</i>	Norm Activation Theory (Schwartz, 1977) Norm Neutralization Theory (Sykes and Maza, 1957) Focus Theory of Normative Conduct (Cialdini, 1990) Theory of Normative Social Behaviour (Rimal <i>et al</i> , 2005) Social Identity Theory (Turner and Tajfel, 1979) Self Categorisation Theory (Turner, 1987)
5. <i>Agency, Efficacy and Control</i>	Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1986) Theory of Self Efficacy (Bandura, 1977) Theory of Fear Appeals (Hovland, 1957) Model of Pro-Environmental Behaviour (Kolmuss and Agyeman, 2002)
6. <i>Habit and Routine</i>	Theory of Interpersonal Behaviour (IIB) (Triandis, 1977) Prototype/Willingness Model (Gibbons and Gerrard, 2003)
7. <i>The Role of Emotions</i>	Affect Heuristic (Slovic, 2002) Risk As Feelings Model (Loewenstein <i>et al</i> , 2001)
8. <i>External Factors</i>	Theory of Consumption as Social Practices (Spaagaren and Van Vliet, 2000) Theory of Structuration (Giddens, 1984)
9. <i>Self Regulation</i>	Control Theory (Carver and Scheier, 1982) Social Cognitive Theory of Self Regulation (Bandura, 1991)

**Table 2.1: Models and theories of individual behaviour**

**Source: Adapted from Darnton (2008: 2–4)**

Using the linear progression ‘knowledge-attitude-behaviour’ it is argued that information provision and education about the environmental costs and benefits of behaviours will increase individual environmental concern and, consequently, “individuals will accept their own responsibilities and acknowledge the need to change aspects of their lifestyles” (Burgess *et al*, 1998: 1446). That is, once supplied with the relevant expert

knowledge, individuals will be facilitated to rationally select pro-environmental behaviours (Steg and Vlek, 2009).

Both the UK and Scottish Governments have invested in strategies to communicate information about sustainability issues, particularly climate change (Nerlich *et al*, 2009), for example, the UK campaigns, ‘Going For Green’, ‘Helping the Earth Begins and Home’, ‘Are You Doing Your Bit?’, and ‘Act on CO2’ (Hobson, 2001; Ockwell *et al*, 2009). Similarly, in Scotland, the recent ‘Go Greener’ campaign clearly embodies the knowledge-attitude-behaviour’ rationale, as the following quote highlights:

*“Key to delivering a Greener Scotland will be the attitudes and, more critically, behaviours of the Scottish public, for example in terms of energy use, travel, waste disposal and recycling. To this end the Government has recently launched a number of communications campaigns, including the Go Greener campaign, which aims to encourage and support people to take action to adopt greener, more sustainable behaviours, focusing on four key areas – reducing waste, saving energy, transport and travel, and community engagement.”*

Scottish Government (2008: 2)

Here, the Scottish Government assumes pro-environmental attitudes to immediately precursor pro-environmental behaviour and, in line with this approach, in 2008, conducted the ‘Scottish Environmental Attitudes and Behaviour Survey’, a major nationwide survey which aimed “to produce dedicated, sound and up-to-date robust social survey data on environmental attitudes and behaviours, supporting the development and delivery of environmental policy, relating specifically to climate change, sustainable development and wellbeing...” (Scottish Government, 2008: 3).

Measuring environmental attitudes is a notoriously controversial and complex task (Stern, 1992; Tarrant and Cordell, 1997). One of the first, and most influential, attempts to gauge environmental concern was the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) (Van Liere and Dunlap, 1978). The NEP was developed as a means of encapsulating the pro-ecological worldview which Van Liere and Dunlap observed to be emerging in the USA during the ‘ecological revolution’ of the 1960s and 1970s (see section 2.1) (Dunlap, 2008). Since its development, the NEP scale has been used extensively in pro-environmental behaviour research, and is the most widely accepted measure of environmental attitudes (Anderson, 2012). However, across this research, positive NEP scores have not been demonstrated to be a reliable means of predicting pro-environmental behaviour (Scott and Willits, 1994), with a large body of research

demonstrating the direct relationship between general pro-environmental attitudes and pro-environmental behaviours to be weak (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002; Kaiser *et al*, 1999; Grob, 1995; Stern and Oskamp, 1987).

As Whitmarsh and O'Neill (2010: 305) observe, “after decades of information campaigns... the [UK] public is prepared to (and often does) recycle, but few take action beyond this”. Overall, research suggests that, despite its popularity, information provision alone is not an effective means of encouraging more sustainable lifestyles (Hobson, 2001). Whilst there is evidence that providing information may raise awareness and invoke more pro-environmental attitudes, there is a lack of evidence to suggest that this will consistently translate into pro-environmental behaviour (McKenzie-Mohr, 2000; Nerlich *et al*, 2009; Kaiser *et al*, 1999). This observed disconnect between pro-environmental attitudes and pro-environmental behaviour is often coined the ‘value-action gap’ (Blake, 1999). This is not to say that environmental information, awareness, and attitudes do not have any influence on behaviour, but it is widely accepted that the basic linear construct of the knowledge-attitude-behaviour model is simply too primitive to explain the complexity of factors influencing individual behaviour (McKenzie-Mohr, 2000).

Consequently, more sophisticated models have been developed which seek to better understand the variables which complicate the pathway from environmental concern to pro-environmental behaviour. Arguably the most influential and widely-used example of these types of models (which can be termed ‘adjusted expectancy-value’ models) is the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985; Ajzen and Madden, 1986; Ajzen, 1988; Ajzen, 1991) (Jackson, 2005). It is within this model, explained briefly in the following sub-section, that the seed of current strategies to encourage pro-environmental lifestyle change at the community-level can be identified.

### ***2.2.2 Social norms***

The TPB, which was developed from the earlier Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980), identifies ‘behavioural intention’, rather than attitude, as the immediate antecedent of behaviour.

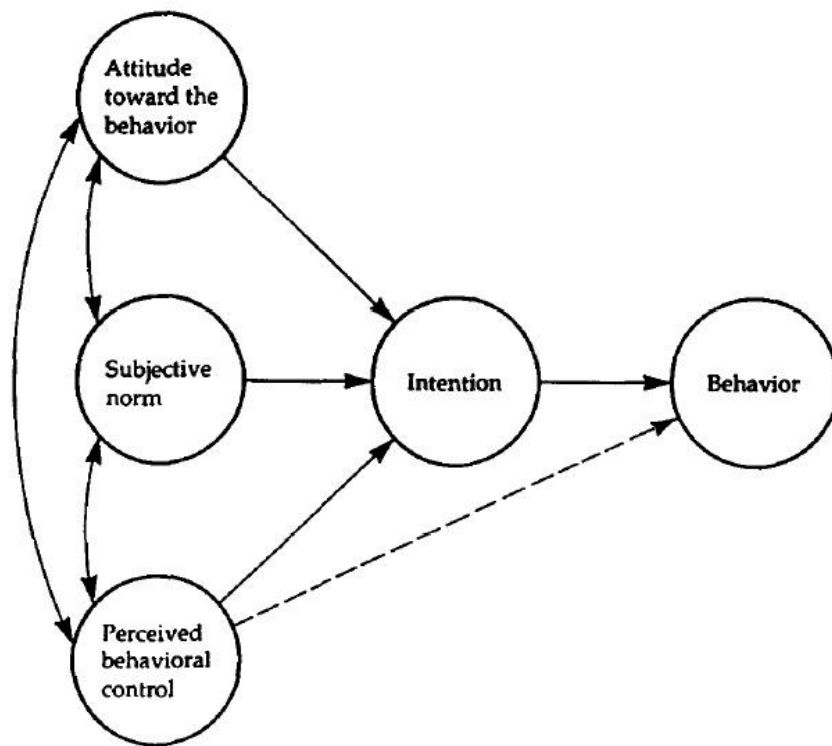


Figure 2.2: Theory of Planned Behaviour  
Source: Ajzen (2002: 182)

As shown in Figure 2.2, attitude towards a particular behaviour (determined by an individual's beliefs about a specific behaviour and their expected outcome from that behaviour) is still considered to be a key influence on behaviour via its influence on behavioural intention, however, the progression from attitude to behaviour is moderated by two additional factors: 'subjective norm' and 'perceived behavioural control' (PBC).

Subjective norm refers to the pressure that an individual feels under to perform a particular behaviour. It is a function of an individual's perception of whether "important others" would approve or disapprove of their performing a particular behaviour and the motivation they feel to adopt (or avoid) that behaviour (Ajzen, 1991: 195). A favourable subjective norm will contribute to a stronger intention to perform the behaviour.

Intention is also affected by PBC, which is defined as "the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior... assumed to reflect past experience as well as anticipated impediments and obstacles" (Ajzen, 1991: 188). The greater the perceived control, the stronger the behavioural intention. But, as Figure 2.2 shows, in addition to being an

indirect indicator of behaviour via behavioural intention, PCB is also identified to be a direct indicator of behaviour in itself. An individual is more likely to carry-out a particular behaviour if they feel confident that they are able to execute it.

The TPB has made an important contribution to understandings of behaviour by identifying the antecedents of attitudes in a finer level of detail than simply 'knowledge', and has been identified as having significant potential in helping to inform behaviour change policy interventions (Collier *et al*, 2010). For example, in 1998, the Scottish Government launched the five-year 'Foolsspeed' campaign, designed using the TPB. The campaign, which aimed to "reduce the use of inappropriate and excessive speed on Scotland's roads" (Stead *et al*, 2002: i), was comprised of a series of television advertisements which were specifically designed to address attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behaviour control. However, whilst the TPB has been demonstrated to generate more accurate predictions of behaviour than relying on attitudes alone, it has been criticised for an insufficiently nuanced appreciation of the full range of normative influences on behaviour (White *et al*, 2009).

The TPB only accounts for the role of social norms in the sense that individuals' behaviour will be influenced by a perceived peer pressure to act in a particular way. This type of social norm, which refers to "one's perception of what others believe to be appropriate conduct" (Cialdini, 2007: 264), has been defined as an 'injunctive norm'. However, Cialdini has identified a second social normative type, the 'descriptive social norm', which refers to an individual's perception of the way others actually behave. People are more likely to perform the behaviour which is socially approved (injunctive norm) and popular (descriptive norm). Whilst the injunctive and descriptive norm are often closely linked, Cialdini (2003: 108) argues that pro-environmental interventions frequently "send the normatively muddled message that a targeted activity is socially disapproved but widespread", which is detrimental to the efficacy of the message. Instead, injunctive and descriptive normative messages should be aligned, for example, sending out messages that most people recycle their household waste, alongside messages that recycling is socially approved.

In addition to a lack of nuance regarding 'social norms', the TPB has also been criticised for an apparent omission of the influence of 'personal norms'.

### 2.2.3 Personal (or moral) norms

In contrast to ‘social’ norms, which refer to an individual’s perception of the expectations and actions of others, ‘personal’ or ‘moral’ norms refer to an individual’s own beliefs about whether a behaviour is inherently right or wrong, and their feelings of moral obligation to adopt or avoid a particular behaviour.

Although accounting for subjective norms, the TPB is still, fundamentally, a rational choice model which assumes that all behaviours are motivated by self-interest (Jackson, 2005). Norms are only accounted for in terms of the positive or negative sanctions that a particular behaviour is perceived to bring for the individual, contributing to a rational choice to adopt or avoid the behaviour based on whether it is personally beneficial.

However, the immediate personal costs of pro-environmental behaviours are often greater than the personal benefits, and individuals are required to act in ways that are not in their own self-interest, but benefit collective interests (Steg *et al.*, 2005).

Therefore, an alternative approach to rational choice models for explaining pro-environmental behaviour assumes that the drivers of these types of behaviours are primarily altruistic, rather than utility-maximising. Arguably, the most influential model to account for personal norms in relation to pro-environmental behaviour is the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) model (Stern *et al.*, 1999), which built on Schwartz’s (1977) Norm Activation Theory (NAT).

NAT, originally developed to explain any form of altruistic behaviour but widely used within the context of pro-environmental behaviour (Harland *et al.* 2007), purports that personal norms are the only direct antecedents of pro-social behaviour. Schwartz argued that, assuming an individual is aware of their actions having adverse consequences and feels personally responsible for those consequences, uptake of pro-social behaviours will conform with their personal norms (Bamberg and Schmidt, 2003; Stern, 2000). Developing this theory, Stern *et al.* (1999) created the VBN to better understand the determinants of low-commitment public support for the environmental movement (including a low willingness to accept policies that require material sacrifices, such as green taxes or regulations, or to adopt pro-environmental behaviours, such as reducing energy consumption).

As shown in Figure 2.3, the VBN model identifies four different types of ‘environmentally significant behaviours’ (Stern, 2000) to be a function of three



antecedent factors: pro-environmental personal norms, environmental beliefs (or attitudes), and personal value orientation (Stern *et al*, 1999; Steg *et al*, 2005). In doing so, the VBN combines and connects three existing models: NAT, the NEP (discussed in earlier in this section), and value theory (Schwartz, 1992; 1994).

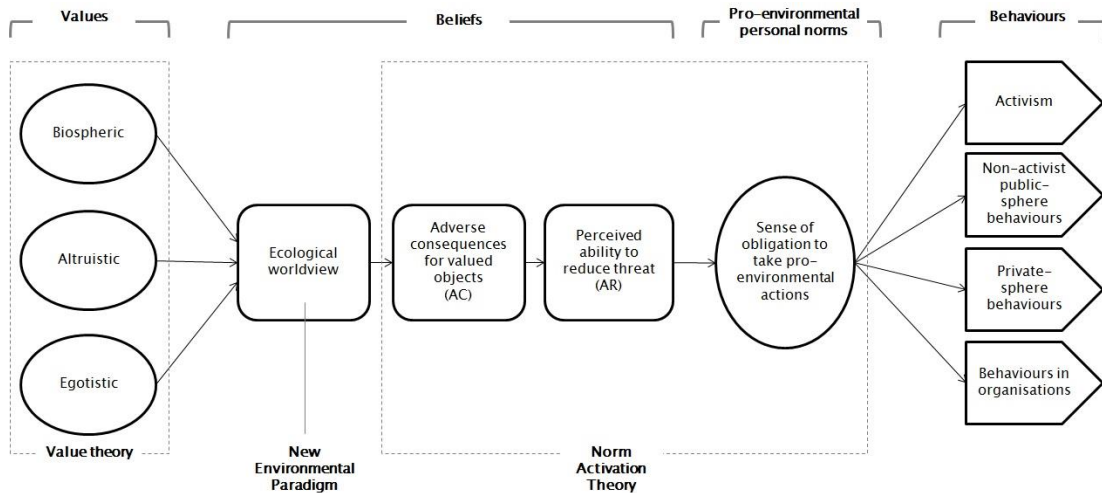


Figure 2.3: The Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) Model  
Source: Adapted from Stern (2000: 412)

Despite providing “a good account of the causes of the general predisposition toward pro-environmental behaviour” (Stern, 2000: 421) the VBN theory, along with all of the theories and models of behaviour described above, derives from social psychology and, as such, focuses on the factors influencing ‘*internal*’ individual motivations to adopt pro-environmental behaviours. Unfortunately, strategies which have attempted to specifically target these internal factors have achieved only limited success (Southerton *et al*, 2011; Heiskanen *et al*, 2010).

A central reason for this observed lack of consistency is that “environmental intent is only one of the factors affecting behaviour, and often, it is not one of the most important” (Stern, 2000: 415). For example, research has found that some pro-environmental behaviours, such as energy reduction, may be primarily motivated by non-environmental concerns, such as for financial or health reasons (Whitmarsh and O’Neill, 2010). Furthermore, in addition to ‘*internal*’, cognitive influences on deliberative decision-making, behaviour is also shaped by a host of ‘*external*’, collective- or societal-level variables.

Although some of these ‘external’ factors have been incorporated into some social-psychological models through their influence on an individual’s decision-making process (such as through personal norms), it is argued that individuals’ behaviours can also be directly facilitated or constrained by external factors which are beyond both their comprehension and their control (Jackson, 2005). As stated at the start of this thesis (p.2), an individual’s physical and social context is widely considered to have a crucial influence on the lifestyle that person adopts, as the following sub-section discusses.

#### **2.2.4 Context**

Guagnano *et al* (1995) argue that interventions to foster behaviour change which focus solely on influencing either the individual’s internal cognitive processes (for example, education programmes) or the external conditions (for example, through regulation or taxation) are bound to fail as they neglect to account for the interaction of the two sets of factors. Consequently, Guagnano *et al* (1995), building on original work by Stern and Oskamp (1987), designed the simple Attitude-Behaviour-Context (ABC) model of behaviour to illustrate how the various causal variables interact.

The ABC model, shown in Figure 2.4, describes behaviours as an interactive product of personal-sphere attitudinal variables and contextual factors (Stern, 2000), the influence of which can vary from extremely positive to extremely negative. For example, an individual may have such negative attitudes towards a behaviour that they would only perform it under coercion, on the other hand, they may have such positive attitudes towards it that they feel compelled to perform the behaviour. Similarly, the influence of contextual factors may be so negative so as to act as a barrier to performing the behaviour (for example if they are overly time-consuming or expensive), or the influence may be so positive that they actively facilitate the behaviour (for example, if they are legally required or tangibly rewarded) (Guagnano *et al*, 1995; Stern, 2000). It is arguably here that the rationale for the political approaches such as the ‘Nudge Unit’ most clearly emerges, focusing as it does on, “shaping the context in which decisions are made, rather than explicitly aiming to persuade or dissuade individuals from engaging in a particular behaviour” (Corner and Randall, 2011: 1010)

The ABC model postulates that the effect of attitudes and context on behaviour is dependent upon their values relative to each other, as opposed to their individual values. In this way, the influence of attitudinal factors on behaviours is strongest when

contextual factors are neutral, and attitudes will have negligible effect on behaviour when the influence of context is either strongly positive (compelling the behaviour) or negative (prohibiting the behaviour) (Stern, 2000).

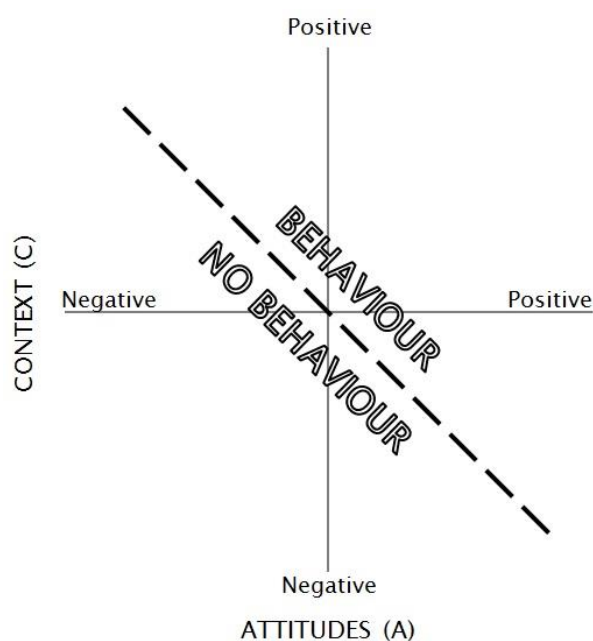


Figure 2.4: The ABC model  
Source: Adapted from Guagnano *et al* (1995: 703)

The model's authors acknowledge that the ABC is not a comprehensive model of pro-environmental behaviour as it does not account for habits or personal capabilities. Instead, the model is intended to demonstrate how the categories of causal variables interact, and highlight the need for policy to encourage behaviour change to take a holistic approach which recognises that behaviour is determined by multiple variables across various categories (Stern, 2000).

The growing appreciation of the pivotal role of context in inhibiting or enabling behaviours has been reflected in a transition in the dominant academic and political discourse, away from isolated pro-environmental behaviours and towards the notion of 'sustainable lifestyles' (Eppel *et al*, 2013; Barr *et al*, 2011). This transition, discussed in further detail in the following sub-section, is central to the framing of my research aim.

### 2.2.5 From behaviours to lifestyles

If individual lifestyles are assumed to be “discrete and functional sets of actions that are open to alteration...[then] the lifestyle can be subject to rationalisation and reorganisation, moving everyone’s behaviour in a more sustainable direction” (Hobson, 2001:193). The transition towards focusing on sustainable lifestyles, over individual pro-environmental behaviours, has perhaps been most visible within Defra, where the aforementioned ‘Framework for Pro-Environmental Behaviours’ (Defra, 2008) was replaced by ‘The Sustainable Lifestyles Framework’ (Eppel *et al*, 2013). A key part of the department’s work is now focused on understanding “how different groups of people see and experience sustainable behaviours within the context of their lifestyles” (Eppel *et al*, 2013: 32), and it is this area of policymaking to which this PhD, and the SLRG as a whole, aims to contribute. However, despite its popularity, there has been some debate about whether the notion of a ‘sustainable lifestyle’ is, in practice, a tangible or useful concept for policymakers (Barr *et al*, 2011).

There is no accepted definition of a ‘sustainable lifestyle’ (Barr *et al*, 2011); however, it is evident that the concept comprises more than single isolated pro-environmental behaviours. Based on extensive research, Defra have identified a set of behaviours which are believed to be central to a sustainable lifestyle. This framework, shown in Table 2.2, includes nine ‘headline behaviours’ and 30 further ‘key behaviours’ which were judged according to their sustainability impact and the potential for action (without major infrastructure change). It is clear from this framework that the ambition to influence lifestyles across a nation is a challenge significantly greater than the – already substantial – challenge of influencing single behaviours (Southerton *et al*, 2011).

One approach to this challenge has been to attempt to segment the population into various lifestyle categories. Defra’s 2008 ‘segmentation model’ shown in Figure 2.5, divides individuals into seven categories according to a raft of variables, including values, attitudes, self-reported behaviours, and socio-demographic characteristics. Using this framework, different segments of society can be assessed in terms of their willingness and ability to act and, subsequently, policy interventions can be more carefully tailored and targeted, delivered in packages of multiple measures at multiple levels (Defra, 2011c).

Headline behaviours	Key behaviours
Eco-improving your home (retrofitting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insulating your home</li> <li>• Upgrading heating and hot water systems</li> <li>• Fitting and using water saving devices</li> <li>• Generating own energy by installing renewables</li> </ul>
Using energy and water wisely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing temperature</li> <li>• Washing and drying laundry using minimum energy and water</li> </ul>
Extending the life of things (to minimise waste)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintaining and repairing (instead of replacing)</li> <li>• Giving new life to unwanted items e.g. furniture</li> <li>• Making the most of kerbside and local recycling services</li> </ul>
Cooking and managing a sustainable and healthier diet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choosing foods grown in season (in country of origin)</li> <li>• Increasing portion of vegetables, fruit, and grains in diet (eating a balanced diet)</li> <li>• Cooking sustainable and healthier food</li> <li>• Wasting less food</li> <li>• Growing your own food</li> </ul>
Choosing eco-products and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using labelling to choose most energy and water efficient products</li> <li>• Choosing fairly traded, eco-labelled, and independently certified food, clothing, etc.</li> <li>• Borrowing, hiring, or sourcing second-hand or recycled</li> <li>• Buying ethically when travelling</li> </ul>
Travelling sustainably	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making the most of cycling, walking, public transport, and car sharing for short journeys</li> <li>• When buying or replacing a vehicle, take advantage of lower-emission models available</li> <li>• Making the most of alternatives to travel, e.g. video conferencing</li> <li>• Making the most of lower-carbon alternatives to flying, e.g. trains</li> <li>• Driving more efficiently</li> </ul>
Setting up and using resources in your community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting up car share and using car clubs</li> <li>• Installing community micro-generation</li> <li>• Sharing knowledge, skills, etc.</li> </ul>
Using and future-proofing outdoor spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gardening for biodiversity and environment</li> <li>• Enjoying the outdoors</li> </ul>
Being part of improving the environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteering (with a local or national group)</li> <li>• Getting involved in local decisions</li> </ul>

**Table 2.2: Behaviours which constitute a sustainable lifestyle**  
**Source: Adapted from Defra (2011c: 11)**

However, segmentation models such as these assume an individual's lifestyle can be neatly categorised and coded. In reality, lifestyles vary, not only between individuals but within a single individual at different times in their life (Brown *et al*, 2011).

Consequently, it is suggested that sustainable lifestyles are best understood, not as fixed frameworks, but as dynamic, fluctuating processes. In order to live a 'sustainable lifestyle', individuals must not only continually redefine their understanding of sustainability to make it applicable to the various behaviours which comprise their lives,

but also repeatedly negotiate their attitudes and agendas as different behaviours come into conflict with each other (Evans and Abrahamse, 2009).

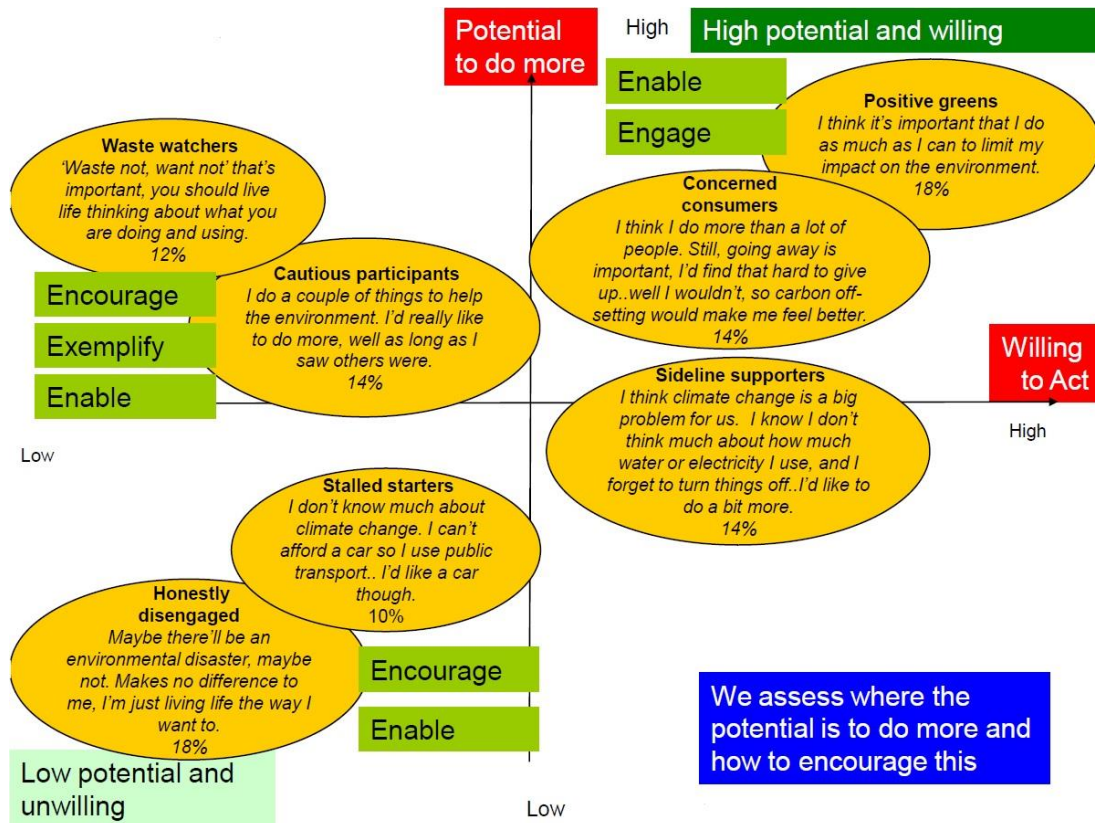


Figure 2.5: Defra segmentation model

Source: Defra (2011c: 18)

Drawing on Giddens (1991), Evans and Abrahamse (2009: 489) suggest, “Lifestyles can be understood, at the most basic level, as the assemblage of social practices that represent a particular way of life and give substance to an individual’s ongoing narrative self-identity and self-actualisation”. Here, ‘social practices’ refers to theory developed within sociology – as opposed to the social psychology origins of much behaviour theory – which seeks to provide a non-individualist perspective on social conduct (Spaargaren, 2011). Social practices can be broadly defined as “routine-driven, everyday activities situated in time and space and shared by groups of people as part of their everyday life” (Verbeek and Mommaas, 2008: 634). Practice theory is still emerging and evolving and, as such, currently encompasses a group of slightly different theoretical approaches (Middlemiss, 2011a). These approaches are united by the perspective that social practices, rather than individuals, should be the focal units of analysis: “Practices

that ‘produce’ and co-constitute individuals and their values, knowledge and capabilities, not the other way round” (Spaargaren, 2011: 815). An increasing number of researchers have sought to apply a practice approach to the analysis of sustainable consumption (e.g, Southerton, 2012; Middlemiss, 2011a; Spaargaren, 2011; Marsden *et al*, 2010; Shove, 2010; Hargreaves, 2008). Although, the aforementioned lack of theoretical clarity on how social practices develop and interact makes practice theory a difficult notion to operationalise in policy (Jackson, 2005), this body of research emphasises the importance of looking beyond the individual, to the collective level, to understand how behaviours are shared and shaped within different ‘systems of provision’ (Shove and Walker, 2010). Consequently, whilst my research does not explicitly employ a practice approach, it is sympathetic to the call for a shift away from narrow models of individual behaviour change (Hargreaves, 2011) in seeking to observe the way in which local physical and social contexts interact with individual lifestyles.

## **2.3 The role of community in encouraging sustainable lifestyles**

As will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Five, the communities have been identified as having the potential to be a particularly effective site at which to encourage and facilitate more sustainable lifestyles as this is thought to be a scale at which interventions to influence both internal and external variables affecting lifestyle choices could be employed (Middlemiss and Parrish, 2010; Peters *et al*, 2010; Mulugetta *et al*, 2010; Peters and Jackson, 2008).

### ***2.3.1 Rationale***

Individuals are often observed to find global-scale concerns, such as climate change, “distant, abstract, and even disempowering” (Macnaghten, 2003: 79), but evidence suggests that the community scale may be an effective level at which to communicate these global-scale environmental messages. This is partially because individuals are believed to be more likely to trust information that comes from community peers as opposed to politicians, the media or local authorities (Reeves *et al*, 2011), but also because the community scale is thought to be the level at which “people are able to learn, feel, and be empowered to act” (Maser 1996: 166).

The physical environment is observed to become most meaningful to people when it engages and interacts with social life and human relationships. Framing environmental

problems at a level at which individuals have a personal, lived experience of the natural world, increases the potential that they will connect with individuals' concern for nature and encourage pro-environmental choices (Macnaghten, 2003).

By embedding localised sustainability interventions into daily lives, “we increase the likelihood that sustainability will acquire the widespread legitimacy that has thus far proved elusive” (Bridger and Luloff, 2001: 461). Furthermore, operating at the community scale allows interventions to be more tailored to the specific needs of the community in question, increasing the likelihood of success (McKenzie-Mohr, 2000). Communities themselves are arguably in the best position to develop the most suitable and effective local sustainability solutions, with the community scale having been identified as an important site for social and technological innovation and experimentation, where alternative solutions for sustainable development can emerge outside of the mainstream (Seyfang and Smith, 2007).

### *2.3.2 Evidence of community-wide lifestyle changes*

Despite the weight of theoretical expectation, there is only limited evidence of the success of community initiatives in eliciting pro-environmental behaviour change (Walker, 2011). The evidence that does exist (e.g. Middlemiss, 2011b; Fudge and Peters, 2011; Preston *et al*, 2009; Peters and Jackson, 2008; Church and Elster, 2002) tend to be limited to self-reported behaviour changes amongst selected participants within particular community projects.

For example, Middlemiss (2011b), in a study of five different projects across the UK, observed that, whilst there was evidence of (self-reported) behaviour change amongst participants, the degree of change that occurred varied significantly, and was influenced by three key factors. First, how actively the individuals participated in the project, with those who were more active reporting greater change than those who were only involved peripherally. Second, how cohesive the organisation running the project were, with better results produced from more cohesive organisations. Finally, whether the project was ‘lifestyle-driven’, that is, explicitly aiming to alter participants’ lifestyles through education, or ‘activity-driven’, whereby projects were focused on engaging people in activities which were in themselves ‘sustainable’ (such as, growing vegetables in an allotment). Here, the lifestyle-driven projects were found to deliver a greater behaviour change amongst participants. However, as Middlemiss (2011b) notes,



“...involvement in community-based action on sustainability cannot be forced, and sustainable outcomes in this context are, therefore, dependent on people volunteering to be involved in these organisations in the first place” (p.277).

Further to this, there is a distinct lack of longitudinal research which has sought to measure the long-term impacts of community-level interventions. As such, there remains a lack of certainty about the level and longevity of lifestyle change that can be achieved through various types of community action (Hauxwell-Baldwin, 2013; Barr and Devine-Wright, 2012; Walker, 2011; Alexander *et al*, 2007; Collins, 2004; Smith *et al*, 2000). In a recent independent case study of the ‘Low Carbon Communities Challenge’ (LCCC), a UK government intervention to promote community-led climate change action, Hauxwell-Baldwin (2013) argues that, although communities can deliver a range of renewable energy and energy efficiency measures, “there is little to indicate that change towards low(er) carbon living necessarily followed, or will follow as a result of similar efforts in the future” (p. 13). ‘This is demonstrated in the text of the official review of the LCCC which found that “some specific household routines and practices did change among *direct recipients* of LCCC measures” (DECC, 2012: 41, original emphasis), but found “very few community-wide shifts in attitudes, behaviour or the uptake of low carbon measures” (DECC, 2012: 41).

This raises the question of whether community-led initiatives are, in practice, an effective means by which to promote and encourage low carbon living throughout the community in question, or whether these initiatives in fact are, as often characterised to be, simply “a middle-class niche pursuit for the ecologically minded” (Barr and Devine-Wright, 2012: 531). As such, my research seeks to better understand how and why individuals engage in community-led initiatives which promote more sustainable lifestyles by examining two communities with an ongoing CCF-funded project.

## 2.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of the existing literature on sustainable lifestyles from which my original research aim emerged. As there is no agreed theoretical definition of sustainability or sustainable living, empirical research which explores how sustainability is interpreted and expressed in specific contexts, both in policy and practice, is arguably essential in evaluating the progress that is being made

and the implications this may have for the future. Designing effective strategies to encourage and facilitate more sustainable lifestyles have been demonstrated to be a particularly complicated and uncertain policy area and, as such, research which seeks to provide more evidence in this field is important if understanding and, consequently, policy-making, is to be improved.

In the following short chapter, I provide the context to my specific research area: community-led initiatives in remote rural Scotland funded through the Climate Challenge Fund.

# 3

## Research context

*“Together we must ensure that all of Scotland’s communities are sustainable and promote well-being and that, in the pursuit of sustainable economic growth for Scotland, no-one is left behind.”*

The Scottish Government (2011b: iii)  
‘Achieving a Sustainable Future’

In the previous chapter, I provided a review of the key literature that has informed current understandings of sustainable lifestyles. Following an overview of the rise of ‘sustainability’ within public consciousness and UK policy over the past thirty years, I discussed the various theories and models of behaviour which have influenced current strategies aiming to engender more sustainable ways of living. I described how, based on the key findings from this literature, the community level has been identified as a potentially effective site at which to facilitate behaviour change, with a number of authors presenting evidence that community-led activity can foster more pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours amongst those who participate. However, I argued that there remains a lack of empirical investigation into the influence that community-led activity can have on the sustainability of local lifestyles more broadly, setting up the gap in current understanding that this thesis seeks to address.

In this short chapter, I introduce the more specific context within which I conducted my research: namely, CCF projects in remote rural Scotland. In the first section I give an overview of the CCF, including its origins and purpose, as well as the findings from a 2008 review of the scheme. In the second section, I introduce my chosen field site, remote rural Scotland, briefly outlining the history of rural life in Scotland, and explaining why it is of particular interest with regard to sustainable lifestyles.

### 3.1 The Climate Challenge Fund

The Scottish Government has recognised that there is a significant role for community-led action in climate change mitigation, stating, “Legislation alone won’t deliver the [emissions] targets. It needs to be translated into real changes in everyday actions: by businesses; the public sector; voluntary and community groups; and individuals” (Scottish Government, 2009: 1). The most significant way in which the Scottish Government supports community-led action on climate change is through the substantial and ongoing investment in the Climate Challenge Fund (CCF).

Established in 2008, the CCF is a Scottish Government initiative administered by Keep Scotland Beautiful (KSB), which provides funding for local, community-led projects designed to reduce carbon emissions. The CCF has been allocated a budget of approximately £10million each year and, to date, has provided support for over 670 different projects, including: community gardens to encourage local food growing; climate change education programmes; forest buy-outs to enable community wood fuel production; local recycling collections; installation of micro-generation infrastructure; electric vehicle trials; and home energy audits. The Scottish Government argues that the CCF approach “empowers communities to deliver projects that are relevant to them and which leave a positive and sustainable legacy for the future” (Scottish Government, 2013a: 129).

The fund was spawned from ‘confidence and supply’ negotiations between the Scottish National Party (SNP) and Scottish Green Party (SGP) following the lack of an overall majority vote in the 2007 Scottish Government elections (Bolger and Allen, 2013). Having failed to form a coalition, the SNP formed a minority government, relying on an informal co-operation agreement from the SGP to support Alex Salmond as First Minister and approve the SNP budget, in return for input on key policy areas (Carrell, 2007). The creation of the CCF was initially a SGP manifesto pledge (Stewart *et al*, 2013), and its inclusion in the 2008 budget was one of the concessions made by the SNP during these negotiations (Bolger and Allen, 2013). The design of the CCF therefore reflects much of the ethos of the SGP, most notably, the decentralisation of power and the importance of environmental protection.

Once launched, the CCF proved very popular (Bolger and Allen, 2013). Initially financed for the three years up to the end of the current parliamentary session, its

continuation was subsequently included in the 2011 manifesto documents of not only the SGP, but also the SNP, Scottish Labour, and Scottish Liberal Democrats (Stewart *et al*, 2013). The SNP went on to win an overall majority in this election and its support for the CCF has continued ever since. The fund was recently extended until March 2016, by which time almost £70 million will have been distributed to hundreds of communities around Scotland.

There have always been three key criteria for the projects supported: that they are community-led, lead to a reduction in carbon dioxide equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e) emissions, and demonstrate a sustainable legacy. However, some aspects of the CCF have evolved since it was first established. At the time that this research began in 2010, the CCF stipulated that projects must achieve measurable CO<sub>2</sub>e reductions within the lifetime of the project, and that projects could not be revenue-raising. Both of these conditions have since changed, as part of a ‘refresh’ of the CCF in 2012, with emissions now estimated over the expected lifetime of the intervention, and projects permitted to generate an income as long as it is used to support further projects that are consistent with the CCF’s aims. However, as both my case studies were conducted prior to this refresh, the projects studied were delivered under the initial conditions. Consequently, my analysis of the role of the CCF funding on those projects reflects these conditions.

In 2011, the Scottish Government commissioned an independent review of the CCF. It was reported that the CCF was “branded a success” by the review (Scottish Government, 2011c: para.1), which supported the notion that the community scale “seems to be one at which climate change action is meaningful to people” (Brook Lyndhurst and Ecometrica, 2011:3). The CCF groups were found to be able to tailor their messages and interventions effectively to match the particular opportunities and barriers known to exist locally, with the projects particularly good at engaging individuals who are already “moderately interested” in the environment and sparking them into action.

However, due to time and resource constraints within the community groups, none of the CCF projects reviewed by Brook Lyndhurst and Ecometrica (2011) were actively seeking to convince uninterested members of the community to participate, and the projects studied were having limited influence on participants’ beliefs, values and attitudes. It was found that projects were more successful in engaging a wider range of

participants when they led with a non-environmental message, such as cost savings, with the environmental message as a secondary factor.

The majority of CCF projects are, according to the terms of Middlemiss (2011b), ‘activity-driven’, that is, centred on delivering specific carbon-saving activities, rather than engendering sustainable lifestyles more holistically (see Chapter Two, p.38). Both Middlemiss and the official CCF review (Brook Lyndhurst and Econometrica, 2011) found that these types of activities are unlikely to engender more sustainable lifestyles in participants. If this is the case, it raises substantial questions about the potential role of community-led projects in encouraging more sustainable lifestyles.

In this research, I examine these questions by looking specifically at the position and influence of CCF-funded community-led sustainability initiatives in remote rural Scotland. While rural areas may now represent a minority in terms of population, it is a large minority and has a strong identity. The history and culture of rural communities is thought to imbue them with a greater capacity for achieving collective goals (Pretty and Ward, 2001). The second section of this chapter provides an introduction to remote rural Scotland, including a brief history of rural Scotland, the criteria by which rurality is determined, and the reasons why I am particularly interested in better understanding sustainable lifestyles in this context.

## 3.2 Remote rural Scotland

Notions of rurality are a common element of everyday imagination, discourse and practice (Clope, 2006), and there are a number of aspects in which “people in the countryside are thought of (and indeed think of themselves) as ‘living their lives in different ways’ from people in the city” (Clope *et al*, 1997: 211). Nevertheless, a universal definition of rurality remains elusive, and the approach taken to the research of ‘rural life’ has evolved over the years in line with the changing perception of what constitutes rurality (Hillyard, 2007).

### 3.2.1 Defining ‘the rural’

Initially, the academic counterbalance to urban studies within Geography neglected to make a distinction between ‘rural’ and ‘agricultural’, and was focused primarily on understanding farming systems. It was not until the 1970s that literature explicitly

acknowledged that rural spaces encompass a much wider network of systems than agriculture alone (Woods, 2010). However, difficulty in identifying the boundaries and characteristics of rural space beyond agricultural systems has meant that much of the focus in rural research throughout the latter part of the 20th century has been on defining what constitutes a rural lifestyle.

Broadly speaking, there are two dimensions of the term “rural”: rural as a socio-geographic region and rural as a social construct (Brown and Schafft, 2011). This distinction has been described as the difference between “rural as space and rural as representing space” (Halfacree, 1993: 34). The former is the traditional approach, using social, demographic, environmental, and economic attributes to distinguish the rural from the urban (Brown and Schafft, 2011). Three salient dimensions of this definition have been identified: i) the extent to which the land has been built over, ii) the density of the settled population relative to its surroundings, and iii) the percentage of the economy of the region that is generated by agriculture (Bibby and Shepherd, 2004). However, the geographical delineation of rural spaces as distinct from urban spaces has been blurred by evidence to suggest that social phenomena associated with the ‘rural life’ crosses these geographical boundaries, and vice versa (Clope, 1997).

The latter, the contemporary theoretical approach, is one which views rurality as a set of social, cultural and moral values which have come to be associated with rural life (Clope, 2006). This view sees places as rural “not because of their structure and/or environmental characteristics, but because people who live there think of themselves as being rural with respect to a set of social, moral, and cultural values, an idealized or idyllic landscape, and/or a lifestyle more attuned to organic community life than to a more bureaucratic and rationalized form of social organization” (Brown and Schafft, 2011: 5). It is argued that “such an approach invites study of how practice, behaviour, decision-making and performance are contextualized and influenced by the social and cultural meanings attached to rural places” (Clope, 2006: 21).

The difficulty of using the modern definition of rurality is that it is a fluid and subjective concept and the remit of this investigation requires an explicit, physical definition of remote rural areas so that the boundaries of study can be defined. Due to this, and due to the fact that this investigation will be centred on rural areas in Scotland, the definition

of ‘rural’ being used is that of the 2012-2013 Scottish Government Urban-Rural Classification, shown in Figure 2.6.

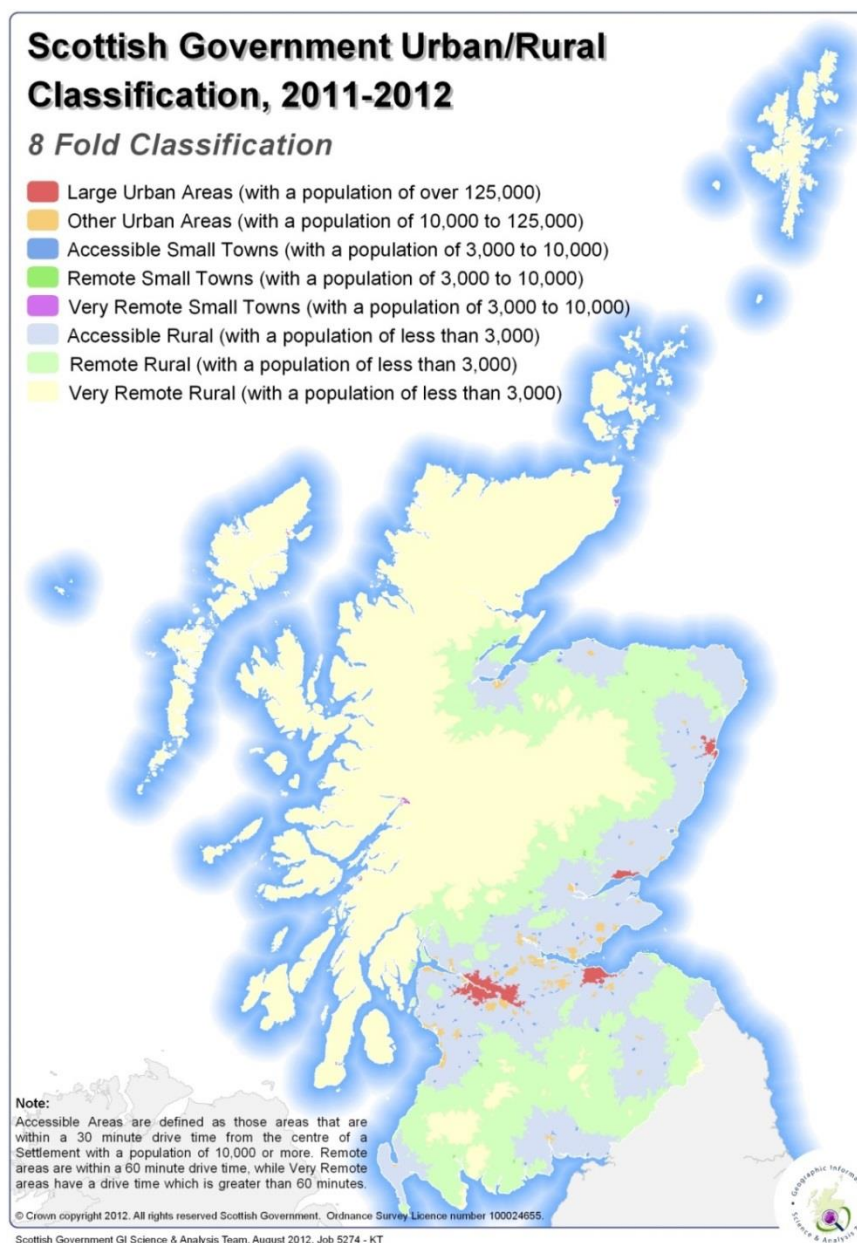


Figure 3.1: Scottish Government 8-fold urban/rural classification  
 Source: Scottish Government (2012a)

This classification defines rural areas as those with populations of fewer than 3,000 people, and remote rural as sites with a drive time of over 30 minutes to the nearest settlement with a population of 10,000 or more (Scottish Government, 2012a). However, that is not to say that the social constructionist view of rurality will be overlooked. The influence of individuals’ perceptions of, and reaction to, their



immediate surroundings is of central relevance to this study and will be considered throughout. As has already been highlighted, the context within which a person lives is a crucial element in defining one's identity and, subsequently, influences decision-making and behaviour choice throughout one's life (Brown & Schafft, 2011).

As noted by Woods (2011: 162), "People living in rural areas make the rural through their own routine practices and performances... through their lifestyle choices, and through their interactions with other rural residents, both human and non-human", and the experience of rural living varies greatly between individuals. It has been contended that it is not just the perception of rurality that is fluid, but that change is in fact an integral part of rurality (Halseth, 1993). By way of demonstrating this concept of flux and change within the reality of rurality, the following subsection briefly outlines some of the formative socioeconomic changes that have occurred in recent history that have helped shape remote rural Scotland of today.

### ***3.2.2 A brief history of rural Scotland***

Until the eighteenth century, Scotland was primarily a peasant society. The vast majority of the Scottish people engaged in traditional subsistence farming practices, which took place in a similar way (if with different crops) across the country. However, despite the fact that almost everyone depended upon the land for survival, very few owned it (Aitchison and Cassell, 2003). A feudal system was established at the end of the eleventh century, under which, 'feudal charters' were granted to certain individuals, giving them governance rights over large estates of land in return for political, military, and financial support. Subinfeudation or 'feuing' (sub-letting or tenancing) became common practice as this generated an annual rental income for the laird, whilst reserving their rights to take back the land at the end of the term. This led to a complicated, hierarchical system of land ownership and tenancy (Wightman, 1999).

With time, the relationship between laird and tenant became an increasingly economic one, as landowners became more concerned with maximising the revenue and profit that could be extracted from their land than with the power and authority it bestowed (Devine, 1999). Traditional primitive agricultural practices, coupled with the largely unfavourable Scottish climate and soils, meant that crop yields were commonly low and tenants could face difficulty making sufficient money to meet rents. Over the eighteenth century, the number of tenancies and agricultural jobs fell as lairds employed

revolutionary labour-saving farm technology which enabled single farmers to work large areas more efficiently (Aitchison and Cassell, 2003). This fall in agricultural employment opportunities, coupled with a rapid rise in new jobs and higher wages in increasingly productive cities, meant that, for over a hundred years, the urban populations of industrialised nations swelled and spread whilst rural populations dwindled and dissolved. Nowhere felt the effects of this revolution more than Scotland. Between 1750 and 1850, Scotland experienced faster urban growth than any other European nation, moving from the seventh to the second most urbanised society in Europe during this time (Devine, 1999). This had a dramatic knock-on effect in the rural lowlands, highlands, and islands. The escalating demands for food, drink, and raw materials from the ever-expanding cities led to the widespread commercialisation of rural society, which became increasingly driven by market forces and a capitalist agenda. In the name of ‘improvement’, traditional, informal, communal agrarian systems were rapidly replaced with clearly defined individual smallholdings possessed by single tenants. The private enclosure of previously common land, vital for the survival of landless rural labourers, forced many to leave. In the Highlands, large estate owners saw sheep, and subsequently deer, as a more lucrative alternative to tenants, leading to the controversial mass evictions and assisted emigration of the now infamous Highland Clearances (Devine, 1999).

It is estimated that, between 1800 and 1860, approximately 250,000 people left the Highlands as a result of the clearances (Withers, 1998). Tenants were removed from land that many saw as their ancestral home, and their reluctance to leave was sometimes met with brutality and inhumanity by landowners (Donaldson, 1993). After years of immense hardship, many crofters across rural Scotland were rebelling against this perceived injustice, attacking police who came to enforce eviction orders, and gaining power in numbers. In 1883, the ‘Napier Commission’ on crofting conditions was commissioned by the Government and, in 1886, the Crofters’ Holding Act was passed, providing security of tenure and fixed ‘fair’ rents for crofters (Smout, 1986). However, despite the apparent political victory, the Act failed to address the need to increase the land available to crofters (which had been greatly reduced in the period of ‘improvement’), and crofting continued to provide a low standard of living (Hoffman, 2013). Consequently, Highland populations continued to decline into the twentieth century, as younger members left in search of better opportunities, causing the birth rate

to fall significantly (Smout, 1986). Despite significant political attention in the early twentieth century, including the passing of Acts of Parliament to conserve rural populations (Jedrej and Nuttall, 1996), depopulation continues to be a major issue for much of rural Scotland (Skerratt *et al*, 2012).

### ***3.2.3 Rural sustainability***

Rural communities are vital to wider society. Rural areas continue to contain the majority of land, water and mineral resources; the majority of the nation's food and energy industries, as well as most of the physical infrastructure, such as dams, roads, bridges, railways, and wind turbines, occupy the rural landscape. Local governments in rural areas consequently manage and maintain the systems upon which much of the wellbeing of the country depends, and the sustainability of these communities is of crucial importance, not only to the individuals comprising them, but also to the urban communities they support (Brown and Schafft, 2011).

As will be discussed in Chapter Six, since the 1970s, the search for the rural 'good life' has led to significant levels of 'counterstream' urban to rural migration, which has facilitated a degree of population revival in some rural places (Clope, 1985). This quest often derives from an awareness of the advantages of rural living, such as a more picturesque landscape, lower noise levels, and lower crime rates (Bergmann *et al*, 2008) where the rural represents "a place of peace, tranquillity and simple virtue, contrasted with the bustle and brashness of the city" (Woods, 2011: 21). It has been observed that the majority of those moving in to rural areas are of an older generation, looking for quieter, and more scenic, non-metropolitan environments in which to retire. This has meant that, despite counterstream migration, many communities in rural Scotland remain unsustainable, rapidly ageing populations (Skerratt *et al*, 2012).

This is particularly the case for remote areas, where uncertainties about the economic future of farming, a lack of affordable housing, and inadequate transport provision are continuing to force young people out in search of better opportunities (Garrod *et al*, 2006). An OECD (2008) analysis of rural Scotland found that in remote rural areas, income, employment opportunities, and health provision are all below the national average, worsened by inadequate infrastructure, such as poor housing and transport networks (OECD, 2008: 5). Similarly, a review of the hill and island communities of Scotland by the Royal Society of Edinburgh (2008) states that, in terms of essential

infrastructure, “there are several key issues: the supply of affordable housing, transport (especially connections by ferries), the provision of high-speed telecommunications systems, the availability of locally-based schools, further and higher education facilities, and key services such as shops, garages and post offices” (p 125).

It has been suggested that the challenges of remote rural living have been exacerbated by the aforementioned history of large estate ownership and feudal tenure system. This has left Scotland with one of the most concentrated patterns of private landownership in the world today (McMorran *et al*, 2014), whereby half of Scotland is owned by 432 people (less than 0.01% of the total population) (Hunter *et al*, 2013). As a result, most remote rural communities continue to rent their land from single estate owners, and many suffer poor management and underinvestment by absentee landlords who have inherited the estate from a long lineage of lairds. In the early 1990s, in what has come to be seen as a landmark moment in Scottish land reform, the private owners of an 8,500-hectare portion of the Assynt estate were declared bankrupt, presenting an opportunity to the crofting community. In 1992, with support from non-governmental organisations, the Assynt Crofters Trust bought the land and renamed it the North Assynt Estate (Halfacree, 2001). This, the first significant community buyout in Scotland since 1923 (Skerratt, 2013), was seen as a catalyst for others which rapidly followed.

### ***3.2.4 Reviving rural communities***

In 2001, following Scottish devolution, the Scottish Government created the Scottish Land Fund, to provide financial support for community buyouts. This was subsequently reinforced with the passing of the 2003 Land Reform (Scotland) Act (LRSA), which established the ‘community right to buy’ (McMorran *et al*, 2014). This legislation permits any community of fewer than 10,000 people to register an interest in purchasing land to which they are connected, giving them a pre-emptive right to buy should it come up for sale (Hoffman, 2013). The LRSA has prompted some large community buyouts, particularly in the Western Isles and Argyll and Bute (McMorran *et al*, 2014).

When crafting the legislation, the Scottish Government explicitly linked the LRSA to sustainable development policy, and set out in the terms of the Act that communities purchasing land must demonstrate that they will do so in a sustainable manner (Pillai,

2010). Indeed, as McMorran *et al* (2014: 21) note, the notion of community land ownership is commonly assumed to be “a logical expression of sustainable development activity”, and a universal good. It can enable and empower communities to take control over their own development based on the known local economic, social, and environmental needs (Pillai, 2010).

Throughout history, collective action and collaboration at the local level has been fundamental to the management of natural resources, whether via clan groups, grazing societies, youth clubs, or labour-exchanges (Pretty and Ward, 2001). As will be discussed further in Chapter Five, sociologists have observed a link between these traditional rural relationships and the aspects of *Gemeinschaft* as described by Tönnies (1935/1955), and, subsequently, perceptions of ‘rural’ and of ‘community’ became closely linked. It is suggested that, in rural locations, community is derived and maintained from the performance of specifically rural practices, and that the “place-rooted nature of these practices” (Woods, 2011: 171) provides a sense of belonging through a deep engagement with the particular physical place in which the community is located. For example, activities centred on crofting in Scottish rural areas are believed to help maintain links to a shared cultural history, reinforcing community bonds. The social capital embedded within these types of rural community groups is thought to have been central to achieving fair and sustainable solutions to local development problems (Pretty and Ward, 2001).

However, there are uncertainties about the ongoing resilience of these communities to the aforementioned seismic changes to traditional ways of life, and the provision of government support to maintain and encourage community-level action is arguably crucial in enabling the survival of these populations. The Scottish Land Fund is one example of how the Scottish Government is seeking to provide this support. Whilst there is evidence that community buyouts are challenging and can lead to local conflicts, there is also evidence that community landownership can lead to a “reinvigoration of community cohesion, pride and ambition” which serves to reconstruct community-environment relationships (McMorran *et al*, 2014: 27).

The CCF is another flagship Scottish Government initiative to support community-level activity, and when the CCF was first launched, it attracted a disproportionately large number of rural projects. This arguably reflects the demand and readiness for funding

for local development projects within rural communities. However, there is little research which has examined how the evolving needs of these communities are being met through these types of grant schemes. Consequently, this research examines the ways in which the provision of funding through the CCF enables more sustainable communities in remote rural Scotland.

### 3.3 Summary

One tactic to engage individuals in more sustainable behaviours that has received particular attention in recent years is that of encouraging community-led initiatives, such as those funded through the Scottish Government's CCF. However, more evidence is needed regarding the efficacy of schemes such as these to alter lifestyles at a significant level. Remote rural Scotland is arguably a particularly interesting site at which to explore these issues as it faces serious issues of local economic and social sustainability, but has a rich tradition of collaborative, co-operative action.

As such, I set out to explore the ways in which government-funded, community-led initiatives are enabling and encouraging more sustainable lifestyles within the context of remote rural Scotland. The following chapter outlines and explains the methods by which I approached this research.

# 4 Research methodology

*“Research is supposed to train the mind into channels of scientific (and therefore respectable) thought, but does not this kind of research sometimes encourage the erroneous belief that only that which can be measured is worthy of serious attention?”*

Lord Platt (1967: 442)

Theory and method are intimately and inseparably intertwined. Theoretical orientation “guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 105). For researchers whose interests lie within a conventional academic discipline, deeply-rooted theoretical paradigms largely circumscribe methodology: the methods selected for a discipline-based study reflect an aim to further that particular branch of knowledge in accordance with the accepted epistemological and ontological boundaries of the chosen discipline (Gilbert, 2008).

Whilst the long tradition of categorising research by discipline maintains a pervasive dominance within academia (Robinson, 2008), it is also well recognised that intellectual issues do not always sit neatly within conventional subject boundaries (Newell and Klein, 1996). In contrast to discipline-led research (which emerges at the edge of a discipline and seeks to expand that body of knowledge), problem-led research is born of, and motivated by, a desire to find solutions to a particular real-world issue, the results of which are equally valuable both within and beyond the academy (Robinson, 2008). Of course, the ‘real world’ is not compartmentalised according to discipline, but is extraordinarily messy and complex. As a result, the bundles of theory and method that prove most useful in problem-led research are themselves likely to be ‘undisciplined’, messy, and complex (Law, 2004).

As has been discussed in the previous chapters, one of the most pressing and challenging global issues currently in need of solution is the unsustainable rate of human-induced environmental change and natural resource degradation (Jackson, 2009). In its recognition of the influence and interplay of economic, social, and environmental

phenomena, the very notion of sustainable development spans and transcends disciplines, and demands that the world be understood as a fundamentally integrated system, as opposed an assemblage of discrete components. As Russell, Wickson, and Carew (2008: 464) argue, “this lens sees solutions as requiring knowledge production that is systems-based rather than reductionist or separate, not constrained by strict knowledge boundaries”. Those seeking to address issues of sustainability have therefore been among the pioneers of ‘cross-disciplinary’<sup>4</sup> approaches (Russell *et al*, 2008).

The SLRG, to which this project contributes (see p.3), follows this rationale. Explicitly set up as an integrated, issue-focused, cross-disciplinary research team, the SLRG had a principal motivation from the outset to be of practical use to government and society, as well as to make a contribution to academic understanding. Whilst many may dispute the legitimacy of calling a single-authored piece of research cross-disciplinary in itself, this PhD adheres to the spirit of cross-disciplinarity in the sense that it has ignored “arbitrary intellectual turf boundaries” (Costanza *et al*, 1991: 3 cited in Hirsch Hadorn *et al*, 2006: 120) and selected methodological tools based solely on their perceived usefulness in gaining a better understanding of the reality of encouraging sustainable living through community-led initiatives in remote rural Scotland.

Data were primarily gathered through two-month periods of participant-observation with two CCF groups in different parts of remote rural Scotland between October 2011 and June 2012. This was supplemented by 27 qualitative interviews conducted before, during, and after participant observation. This chapter provides the details of the methods chosen, beginning with a brief explanation of the epistemological and ontological roots of my methodology, which leads into a discussion of the rationale behind the decision to conduct participant-observation within a case study framework. I elaborate on the practical details of the research methods employed, the challenges that I anticipated, and the means by which the fieldwork sites were chosen. After short profiles of the two case study communities, I describe my experience upon entering the

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4. An increasing recognition in recent years of the value of research which bridges and transcends traditional academic boundaries has spawned a host of variously articulated versions of ‘cross-disciplinary’ approaches, including, multi-, pluri-, inter-, and trans- disciplinarity. These categories can be, and have been, individually described and defined, to various levels of detail, so that each may be recognised as a particular style of cross-disciplinary working (cf Max-Neef, 2005). For the purposes of this thesis, ‘cross-disciplinarity’ is understood and used as it is in Russell *et al* (2008: 461), as “an umbrella term for approaches that break with disciplines”.



field, and outline the iterative process of synthesis, analysis, and further data collection that occurred upon my return.

#### 4.1 The ‘multi-headed beast’ of social research methods

Researchers interested in better understanding social life have long struggled with apparent methodological contradictions between, on one hand, a recognition of the inescapably hermeneutic dimension of social phenomena and, on the other, a desire to eschew an inheritance of “philosophical romanticism” and adopt methods which will be perceived as ‘scientifically’ sound (Law, 2004: 8; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

Over time, this internal conflict has led to what Law (2004: 4) refers to as “an encouragingly multi-headed beast” of research methodologies within the social sciences, ranging from those which closely resemble the methods of the natural sciences at one end of the spectrum, to those which completely reject the use of scientific methods for social research at the other (Burawoy *et al*, 1991). There is no single right way in which to study society; the researcher must make their own decisions about the most appropriate approach based upon their own ontological and epistemological orientation. In the following subsection, I provide an overview of the fundamental theoretical foundations and justifications from which I devised my methods.

##### 4.1.1 Social ‘science’

Auguste Comte, in the mid-nineteenth century, first proposed that society should be studied and measured according to scientific reasoning (Babbie, 2007). Comte’s arguments, which were subsequently progressed and developed by early sociologists such as John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, and Emile Durkheim, laid the foundations for modern social science and the ‘positivist’ paradigm (Hassard, 1995). According to positivist reasoning, society and social phenomena can – and should – be explained using a system of universal laws and rational logic (Gilbert, 2008). Positivists seek to *objectively* gather and analyse directly observable social ‘facts’ so as to test hypotheses about human behaviour (May, 2001). In order to achieve objectivity, quantitative data collection methods, mirroring those of the natural sciences, are rigidly standardized to eliminate any influence of the observer and allow for the process to be replicated by others (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). However, traditional positivism is now widely considered to be an out-dated paradigm (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), and methods

of 'scientific' reductionism are often deemed inappropriate for social research (Sawyer, 2005; Taylor, 2002).

The assumption that objectivity is ever truly attainable in the social sciences is undermined at a philosophical level by post-modern theory (Babbie, 2007). Any attempts to define a 'true' or 'natural' state of the world, independent of personal perceptions, are ultimately in vain because it does not exist; our perception of 'reality' is intrinsically dependent upon our own idiosyncratic interpretations of our observations. This is perhaps particularly significant when researching social phenomena because we are dealing with many layers of interpretation, as Tim May explains:

*"...we research a social world which people are already interpreting and acting within. To assume that we can separate these activities from scientific fact may be not only an impossibility, but also undesirable for the production and practice of social science itself"*

May (2001: 33)

People are the base units of society and, consequently, the fundamental subject matter of social science; as a person in society, the researcher is an inextricable part of the very phenomena being measured. According to interpretivist reasoning, individuals are unable to detach themselves from the understandings and meanings they bring to a given situation because it is through the knowledge that they have learned and inherited from their participation in society that they make sense of the world around them (Denzin, 1997). It therefore becomes highly problematic to suggest that, as researchers, we are able to theorise on the social world independently of our personal preconceptions. Any findings of social research will always inevitably be, to some extent, an interpretation based on this knowledge, rather than an unbiased, objective analysis of 'the facts'.

However, as Flyvbjerg (2001) argues, a more fundamental flaw in seeking abstract universal, predictive theories of the social world than that of hermeneutics, or the postmodern view of reality, is the inescapable influence of context on the social phenomena in question:

*“The problem in the study of human activity is that every attempt at a context-free definition of an action, that is, a definition based on abstract rules or laws, will not necessarily accord with the pragmatic way an action is defined by the actors in a concrete situation. Social scientists do not have a theory (rules and laws) for how the people they study determine what counts as an action, because the determination derives from situationally defined (context-dependent) skills, which the objects of study are proficient and experts in exercising, and because [predictive] theory – by definition – presupposes context-independence.”*

Flyvbjerg (2001: 42)

This is not to say that I believe the actions of individuals are *determined* by their context, but that there is “an open-ended, contingent relation between contexts and actions and interpretations” (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 43). In its quest for general laws and models of social phenomena, positivism disregards the inherent uniqueness of particular societies and produces what has been described as an “empty universalism” (Taylor, 2002: 2).

This research, therefore, adopts the ontological position that reality is subjective, constructed, and multiple, and the epistemological position that understandings of society are the perception of the researcher within a particular context. In the remainder of this section, I explain how my decision to take a qualitative, case study approach has emerged as the most appropriate means by which to conduct my research based on this theoretical underpinning.

#### **4.1.2 The case study**

There is significant ongoing debate over the necessary, defining features of a case study (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). John Gerring, from his perspective in political science, observes the following of case study research:

*“Even among its defenders there is confusion over the virtues and vices of this ambiguous research design. Practitioners continue to ply their trade but have difficulty articulating what it is that they are doing, methodologically speaking. The case study survives in a curious methodological limbo”*

Gerring (2004: 341)

Case studies are hugely diverse: they can be inductive or deductive, exploratory or explanatory, descriptive or illustrative, single or multiple (Babbie, 2004). This lack of consistency across case study research has been attributed to the fundamental plurality of the term ‘case’ itself, which is used in very different contexts to refer to various types

of category or sub-unit (Ragin, 2000). It has been suggested that all research could be described as ‘case study’ research, in the sense that there must always be some specific unit, or units, of data under investigation (Gomm *et al*, 2000). Whilst I favour flexibility and fluidity in the application of research methods, this all-encompassing conception of case study research is clearly not a methodologically expedient one.

One response to this apparent universal-applicability has been to define a case study not by what it *is* but by what it is *not*. For example, Ragin (2000: 5), defines the “case-orientated” approach by its divergence from the “variable-orientated” approach. In the latter, the researcher is primarily interested in the patterns of a small number of *variables* across a large set of ‘cases’, whereas in the former, a small number of *cases* are the central focus, with an interest in how the many ‘variables’ within each case fit together.

However, as Ragin acknowledges, this begs the question, “What is a case?”. In answer to this, Stake (1978: 7) asserts that ‘a case’ can be any “bounded system” of interest to the researcher, but that it is the specific, conscious emphasis on these boundaries that distinguishes the case study approach:

*“[The case study] is distinctive in the first place by giving great prominence to what is and what is not "the case" - the boundaries are kept in focus. What is happening and deemed important within those boundaries (the emic) is considered vital and usually determines what the study is about, as contrasted with other kinds of studies where hypotheses or issues previously targeted by the investigators (the etic) usually determine the content of the study.”*

Stake (1978: 7)

The defining feature of the case study is therefore its emphasis on the real-life context within which phenomena are observed (Yin, 1981). By setting these boundaries, it is intended that the fine-grain of complex patterns of social phenomena can be better observed, leading to a more nuanced understanding of observations (Yin, 2009). This clearly adheres to the theoretical foundations and aims of this PhD, in which the emphasis is very much on the specific context of community-led sustainability initiatives in remote rural Scotland.

However, as Yin (1981) stresses, the ‘case study’ describes an overriding research strategy or framework, but is not itself a *method*; electing to conduct a case study does not dictate the type of data to be collected or the way it is to be collected. Therefore, researcher must make a decision about the best way in which to gather information on

the case study in question. An effective and popular method of data collection within the social sciences is to ask the people being studied for information about their behaviours and lifestyles.

#### ***4.1.3 Self-reported data***

The use of self-reported data, that is, information about a participant's behaviour is supplied to the researcher by the research participant themselves, is common in behavioural studies (Steg and Vlek, 2009). Both quantitative and qualitative data can be gathered through self-reports, using various techniques, for example, quantitative studies may use closed-question, self-completion questionnaires, while qualitative studies might involve unstructured interviews, where the researcher has a more open discussion with the participant about the various issues of interest.

Self-reports provide a means by which to understand respondents' perceptions of themselves, of others, and of the world in which they live. Consequently, asking research participants direct questions is often considered the most effective way of gathering information (Barker *et al*, 2005). On a more practical note, it has been suggested that self-reports are the most cost- and time- efficient way of collecting large bodies of evidence on a wide range of behaviours (Corral-Verdugo, 1997).

However, it is well recognized that respondents regularly inflict multiple forms of bias upon self-reported data, both consciously and subconsciously (Corral-Verdugo, 1997). The respondent may purposefully deceive the researcher, for example, by not wanting to reveal thoughts or actions known to be socially undesirable (Barker *et al*, 2005). In an affluent society such as the UK, where average environmental concern is relatively high (Franzen and Meyer, 2010), it is likely that subjects will exhibit some degree of 'socially desirable responding', that is, they will over-estimate behaviours considered pro-environmental and under-estimate those perceived to be environmentally detrimental, suggesting to the researcher that they lead a more sustainable lifestyle than they actually do (Steel, 1996). When this is added to the inevitable interpretations and subjectivities that the researcher themselves will always subject their data to (as discussed on page 54), this suggests that evidence produced from self-reports is likely to be layered with the multiple interpretations of the participants and the researcher (Lofland and Lofland, 1995).

It is also important to note that people are often unaware of the causes of their own behaviour (Barker *et al*, 2005). Behaviours are the result of a complex interaction of intended and unintended, internal and external factors which are ever-changing and evolving (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). Participants may not always have conscious awareness of their decision-making processes, and complex psychological processes may even prevent individuals from accessing past emotions and experiences. Consequently, some interview participants may be fundamentally incapable of engaging with the underlying concepts that the researcher is interested in exploring (Barker *et al*, 2005). Law (2004) argues that, while traditional social science methods, such as surveys and questionnaires, are often important tools for answering certain questions about social observations, they are not effective for capturing those phenomena that are “slippery, emotional, ephemeral, elusive or indistinct” (p.2). Law suggests that the current normativity attached to these research methods stifles creativity and heterogeneity because, as researchers, we must follow given rules on “how we must see and what we must do...” (p.4). He proposes that, instead of accepting standard research methods as a swift and secure route to knowledge, we need “a way of thinking about method that is broader, looser, [and] more generous” (p.4).

This PhD, acknowledging the value of self-reported data in assessing individuals’ perceptions and experiences, incorporates data from 27 semi-structured, one-on-one interviews (details of the interviews conducted can be found in Table 4.1, p.78). However, with this research I have also sought to address some of the aforementioned disadvantages of self-reports by complementing interview data with evidence gathered using an ‘ethnographic approach’.

#### ***4.1.4 The ethnographic approach***

Sociologist John D. Brewer provides the following definition of the concept of ethnography:

*“Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally”*

Brewer (2000: 10)

Originating in anthropology, and literally meaning ‘writing people’, ethnography is not a particular, distinct research method *per se*, but a tradition of composing detailed descriptions of unfamiliar cultures and communities (Mitchell, 2007). In order to achieve this, ethnographic researchers undergo total immersion into a particular social setting and employ a variety of largely unstructured, inductive methods of data collection, dominated by participant-observation, and amass a very large quantity of situated knowledge from a range of different sources (Taylor, 2002; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

Rather than trying to neutralise the impact of the researcher on the society in question, the ethnographer acts as a measurement tool by consciously and purposefully becoming both observer of, and participant in, that society (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). In this way, the ethnographic approach embraces the fact that the presence of the researcher in the field will unavoidably alter the social interactions under investigation (Ferreira, 2009), recognising that many aspects of social life can only be understood through prolonged, direct experience of the lives of the members of that society (Fielding, 2008). By using a single lens of interpretation – that of the researcher – ethnographers strive to recognise and acknowledge the preconceptions applied to the evidence through self-awareness and research reflexivity and, consequently, be as transparent as possible in their interpretation of the data (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). Understanding and analysing the identity of the researcher, and the relationship between the researcher and the researched, therefore becomes a core element of this type of study (Taylor, 2002). Atkinson *et al* (2003) provide a convincing explanation of the perceived value of such an approach:

*“Participant-observation is significant not just because the researcher can ‘see’ things happen. It rests on something much more fundamental: it is possible by virtue of the human and social capacity we have – as ordinary actors – to engage with our fellow men and women, and through practical and symbolic transactions with them to acquire some degree of understanding of them... achieving at least a partial perspective on the social world and on ourselves from the point of view of others.”*

Atkinson *et al* (2003: 115)

The length of fieldwork required for research to be classified as ‘ethnographic’ has been extensively debated (Agar, 2006), with some traditional anthropologists considering it necessary to spend a minimum of a year or two in the field to compile a true

ethnography (Wolcott, 2005). However, it is now broadly accepted that there is no minimum qualifying length for ethnographic research, rather the researcher should stay in the field “long enough for his or her presence to be considered more or less ‘natural’ by the permanent residents, the informants”, which may take anything from a few months to a few years (Eriksen, 2001: 24).

Mitchell (2007) suggests that it is not possible to explicitly define or delimit the particularities of ethnographic fieldwork because the uniqueness of each ‘field’ and each ethnographer means that problems, and the researcher’s responses to them, will be unique in each case. He therefore argues that, “the fieldwork concept describes a flexibility of approach and a willingness to respond to the constraints and possibilities of the field, rather than imposing a version of fieldwork upon it” (p.59).

An example of the flexible and productive nature of ethnography can be found in ‘Sidewalk’, Duneier’s 2001 ethnography of five years spent observing and participating in the lives of people living and working on the streets of Greenwich Village, New York. Duneier’s approach was to completely submerge himself in the community, integrating into the ‘network’ in order to gain contacts and introductions he would otherwise have been unable to access. He entered this society with no specific research questions, but with the simple objective of observing and participating in the internal and external interactions of members of the community. Duneier believes that this approach allowed him to come to his own conclusions about life on the sidewalk, rather than having to rely solely on the interpretations of others that are captured in interviews. He also found that this methodology enabled unanticipated questions and topics about social processes to gradually emerge so he was able to shape his research around the data that was being collected. As the key issues were drawn out, additional methodologies were introduced such as: more structured interviews with influential members of the wider community; tape recordings of conversations between community members in his absence; and photographs taken by a local photojournalist.

My methodology was inspired by, and draws heavily on, this style of research.

However, it is important to state that, whilst I was interested in the cultural factors particular to remote rural Scottish communities that influence the sustainability of the lifestyles of the people living in them, it was certainly not an objective of this PhD to produce an anthropologist’s ‘thick description’ of such a community. As stated in the



introduction to this thesis, this research was part of the SLRG, a group of studies funded by the UK and Scottish Government to better understand processes of lifestyle and behaviour change, and to offer evidence to support policymaking to encourage more sustainable lifestyles. When the intention of social research is to inform policy, there is a pragmatic balance to be struck between the collection of such rigidly quantitative data that it fails to adequately represent the complexity of reality, and the production of vast and highly subjective, qualitative narratives that are unlikely to be considered immediately useful to policymakers (Cloke, 1997). Therefore, although I collected data primarily through participant-observation, I entered the field with a flexible but bounded research aim, which trained my focus on a particular aspect of everyday life. This is in contrast to the anthropological tradition of immersing oneself in a foreign culture free of any specific questions and allowing the entire research design to emerge organically over an extended period of time in the field. This thesis does not, therefore, profess to be ‘an ethnography’, but rather takes what can be described as an ‘ethnographic approach’ to case study research.

## 4.2 Methodological challenges

Whilst the potential benefits of an ethnographic approach, described above, have been well documented, this literature is at least matched by that highlighting the substantial challenges of this style of research. The participant-observer is a complex and demanding role to play: as ethnographer John Van Maanen (2011: 219) notes, ‘participant-observation’ is “a rather stock if oxymoronic phrase that indexes one of the most impressive ways yet invented to make ourselves uncomfortable”.

A participant-observer occupies a complicated, and often exhausting, space between insider and outsider, in which they must strive to become completely embedded in the social setting under investigation whilst simultaneously remaining somewhat detached from it (Smith, 2010; Fielding, 2008; Davies, 1999). The pressure on the participant-observer to constantly maintain their analytical perspective and keep track of intimate details of everything going on around them can be overwhelming. For example, Law (2004) recalls his experience of feeling overwhelmed at the beginning of a year of participation-observation:

*“I found that I was constantly being dazzled. There was too much going on... Sometimes, especially in the early days of the ethnography, I found that I needed to retire to my car to eat my sandwich by myself at lunch time, or use the library to make some peace.”*

Law (2004: 107-8)

Law’s description resonates strongly with my experiences in the field. As I discuss more fully in the final chapter of this thesis (p.191), I found participant-observation a physically and mentally exhausting experience in which I was often wracked with anxiety and guilt. Much of this emanates from the moral dilemma faced in occupying a very unique social position, which requires the researcher to consciously manipulate their behaviour and appearance for the sake of their research, a practice termed ‘front management’.

#### ***4.2.1 Front management***

Ethnography is, by its very nature, intrusive while remaining detached: “close up but always from the outside looking in and ‘through a glass darkly’” (Scheper-Hughes, 2000: 128). Upon entering a social world vastly different from their own, the researcher is required to undertake a degree of deception as they (consciously or subconsciously) alter aspects of themselves in order to fit in and gain trust (Taylor, 2002).

Erving Goffman (1959; 1963) argues that personal interaction is always a form of performance that reflects the way in which an individual wishes to be perceived by others. In executing this performance, individuals adopt a “front”, which Goffman defines as, “the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his [sic] performance” (1959: 32). This front incorporates the setting, appearance, and manner of the performance, and dictates the role being played. The performance desired and required by an individual varies according to the social situation and, in order to convincingly blend in to different scenes, individuals often need to manage and manipulate this front.

Whilst front management is regularly performed (with varying degrees of awareness) in an individual’s day-to-day navigation of the social world, it becomes a much more deliberate and calculated process within participant-observation, where an individual consciously acts in a certain way in order to gain acceptance. However, front management can be a sensitive and complex issue, becoming more challenging and

complicated as the degree of strategic modification of one's 'true' self increases (Fielding, 2008). Goffman suggests that there are certain elements of behaviour that are more instinctive and less controllable than others which may be used by others as a check upon the validity of the impression one is attempting to convey. Consequently, there is a risk that one's deception will be discovered by others and that they will "seek in this very act of manipulation some shading of conduct that the individual has not managed to control", resulting in loss of trust (Goffman, 1959: 20).

As a London-born, city-dwelling student, it was inevitable that I would need to adapt my 'performance' in order to fit into my new situation in a remote rural Scottish community. There were times and situations in which I consciously chose to mute my personal beliefs, values, and attitudes in order to favour the way I was perceived, with the view to gaining a greater degree of social acceptance. For example, I often found myself exaggerating how much I enjoyed various aspects of remote rural life in an attempt to gain friends locally, whilst, in reality, missing the comforts and conveniences of the city. I also acted in ways that I hoped would encourage the members of the communities to forget that I was an observer at all, with the ambition of gaining more candid experiences of everyday life. For example, I was pro-active in helping out on various projects, offering to take on particular responsibilities within the groups so that I appeared more like a member of staff than a researcher. I reflect on these instances in more detail in the concluding chapter of this thesis (pp.191-199).

I was aware before I began my fieldwork that it can be difficult to consistently maintain a front for long periods of time (Gold, 1958) and so, by and large, I tried to be myself as much as possible. I never had any intention to attempt to deceive the communities I joined, and made the decision to be truthful and open about my background, my research aims, and my reasons for being there from the start. It might be argued that the awareness of being observed may have led individuals to modify their behaviour, either consciously or subconsciously, in order to present a more favourable image of themselves and the group. However, due to the relatively uncontroversial and, I assumed, largely benevolent nature of community-led sustainability projects, it seemed unlikely that significant modifications would, or could, be made consistently over the full two-month period of observation. Any possible gains that might have been made

by concealing my purpose for being there did not appear to justify the clear violation of the principle of informed consent involved in going undercover (Bulmer, 2008).

Despite my best intentions to gather honest data, the unstructured, eclectic, and often opportunistic, methods employed in an ethnographic investigation (discussed in the section 4.3) results in the researcher gathering very large quantities of diffuse data which must then be converted into a coherent analysis. This process is necessarily deeply subjective and, consequently, a primary question often asked of participant-observation is one of validity (Fielding, 2008), as explained in the following discussion.

#### ***4.2.2 Validity***

Ethnography is necessarily deeply subjective, therefore, the ethnographer must develop a ‘disciplined subjectivity’ (Scheper-Hughes, 2000), and must always be transparent about the subjectivities through which reality is refracted by being explicit about the methodologies, biases and uncertainties associated with any conclusions drawn (Duneier, 2001). As Humphreys and Watson (2009: 43) state, “No research account can ever be totally ‘true’ but...some accounts are truer than others”. It is imperative when conducting ethnographic research that the identity, as well as the fundamental values, beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge-base of the researcher are thoroughly acknowledged and analysed in order to be as transparent as possible about the way in which these factors will alter the relationship with the social actors being investigated, and how this may in turn affect the results gathered and the conclusions drawn. In the case of this research project, a number of my own personal attributes inevitably impacted on the way in which I was received, and the interactions I had with the society I enter, are readily identifiable.

First, and arguably most thoroughly reviewed in the academic literature on social dynamics, is the role of gender. As West and Zimmerman (1987) argue, there is an essential, inescapable difference between men and women, and therefore social norms and stereotypes regarding what constitutes the male or female role, whilst variable through time and space, are omnipresent in society and will shape the way in which people behave (Deutsch, 2007). In the case of my research, this social phenomenon functions both in terms of the way in which I conducted myself, and how the people I observed interacted with me. I was aware before starting fieldwork that, in rural areas where initiatives to increase social capital were being undertaken, civic organisations

were overwhelmingly populated and led by males (Healy *et al*, 2007). This was certainly true of my two case study organisations, which both employed two women within total staff numbers of seven and 12. As a 27 year old woman at the time of the fieldwork, it is perhaps because of my age and gender that I was welcomed into both groups and appeared to be generally considered as an unthreatening addition to the teams.

In addition to age and gender, there are a number of other aspects of my identity that are likely to have influenced how I was perceived by the communities. As a student conducting a research project, the community group members were aware that I was there for instrumental personal gain. This is likely to have resulted in me being treated differently to, for example, someone who had moved into the area permanently, or who was seeking paid employment. However, as mentioned in the previous subsection (p.65), I tried my best to blend in to the workforce, helping with administrative tasks in the office, and often offering to make cups of tea for everyone. However, there were a couple of instances where I experienced some resistance to the idea that members of the community were the subjects of my investigation, which I discuss in Chapter Nine (p.198).

I was also conscious that the knowledge that I am completing a post-graduate degree in environmental sustainability at the University of Edinburgh may have led to assumptions regarding my social status or affluence, which may have resulted in a degree of distancing between me and some members of the communities. In order to minimise the risk of this, I consciously avoided giving details about my academic background, and most commonly referred to myself as a student completing a placement with the community group in question. As far as I could tell, this was broadly accepted by most people I spoke to, who didn't probe me any further.

I expected the sense of me being different from the members of the community I was studying to be exacerbated by my Englishness. In a study of teenagers in Dundee, Abrams and Hogg (1987) found that, when comparing the reactions to three speakers with accents from i) Dundee, ii) Glasgow, and iii) England, regarding the speaker's status, likely employment, and feelings of solidarity with the speaker, there was an obvious pattern of in-group favouritism, that is that the speakers with a traditional English accent were rated most negatively, and those from their hometown of Dundee most positively. I have an accent typical of having spent the first 25 years of my life in

South East England, which I assumed would result in me being received more negatively than if I were to have a local, or Scottish accent. The issue of accents links into the inescapable ethnographic concept of being an outsider to the community, and the impact that this inevitably has on social interaction. Not only my English accent, but also my inexperience of rural life – having always lived and worked in urban areas – is likely to have amplified my conspicuousness as a non-native. The influence that the classification as an ‘outsider’ has on acceptance has been identified as particularly significant in rural locations. For example, in a comparison of 1,506 Australian households, Stone and Hughes (2001) found that rural residents were more likely to report higher levels of trust in local people than urban dwellers, but a lower tolerance of diversity and less inclination to interact cooperatively with outsiders (Healy *et al.*, 2007).

Despite these initial concerns, I wasn’t aware of any particular, personally-directed negativity regarding my accent or status as an ‘outsider’. As examined in depth in Chapter Six, it was an interesting observation of my research that many of those involved in the two community groups I studied were themselves English, or from outside the local community. Therefore, my accent did not mean that I particularly stood out as a non-permanent member of the groups, which worked to my advantage in terms of blending in.

Having acknowledged this need for self-reflexivity, it is also important to remember that there is a danger of taking introspection too far. Too great a focus on self can result in the research becoming more of an in-depth account of one’s own psychological construct and interpretative processes, than of the original research question (Davies, 1999). Therefore, having provided the reader with an insight into my own personal biases, the findings, analysis, and discussion in the subsequent chapters are presented simply as my version of events, as honestly and transparently as possible. In the concluding chapter of this thesis, I return to these themes and reflect more holistically on how the research process, and my chosen methodology, has influenced the findings and conclusions of the study.

### 4.3 Research design

In light of the preceding discussion, this PhD can be seen as situated within an interpretivist theoretical paradigm, in that it understands knowledge to be a socially

constructed and subjective interpretation of a set of observations, rather than the outcome of the successful discovery of some single, sovereign truth (Schwandt, 2003). All phenomena are considered to be socially situated and influenced by the context in which they occur (Flyvbjerg, 2001). In line with this philosophical stance, a case study framework, employing an ethnographic approach and qualitative data collection techniques was considered most appropriate for this research.

As explained in the introduction to the thesis, whilst the overarching aim of the research was established from the start, the precise remit of the investigation was not defined before beginning fieldwork. This approach can be labelled an ‘emergent’ research design, in which the methods of data collection and analysis, as well as the research questions, are allowed to evolve as the research progresses, in accordance with what is being learned in the field (Morgan, 2008). This type of approach is considered particularly appropriate for problem-based research, as it allows unforeseen empirical observations to guide the methodology, as Charmaz (2008: 151) explains:

*“An emergent method begins with the empirical world and builds an inductive understanding of it as events unfold and knowledge accrues. Social scientists who use emergent methods can study research problems that arise in the empirical world and can pursue unanticipated directions of inquiry in this world”*

Having been born and brought up in a London suburb, and subsequently always lived within a major city, I had no experience of remote rural living before embarking on this research. Whilst this has immediately apparent disadvantages in terms of my familiarity with the subject of my research, it also presented an opportunity. Informed by the practice and rationale of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), I considered it to be advantageous to the research aims to enter the field free of preconceived theories about what would be observed. As Glaser and Strauss state, “...it is presumptuous to assume that one begins to know the relevant categories and hypotheses until the ‘first days in the field’, at least, are over” (1967: 34).

Following this rationale, it has been argued that starting fieldwork with limited experience and knowledge of the case in question “creates a space where the unexpected can occur” (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007: 25). The direction of the research is free to be guided by the data. Through a process of constant comparative analysis (Simmons, 2010), inductively gathered data is analysed immediately upon collection, forming tentative concepts which inform and focus future data collection and analysis.

Through this iterative procedure of constant comparison and integration of data and analysis, observations, and notable absences, direct the researcher in a process of discovery (Corbin and Strauss, 1990).

It is important to stress, however, that I do not believe that this lack of prior knowledge and theory eradicates subjectivity. Therefore, I do not adhere to the definition of grounded theory as a method through which bias is “minimized to the point of irrelevancy” (Glaser, 2002: 3). As is suggested by the description of the theoretical underpinning of this research, I fully acknowledge that my life experience, education, and personal interests will play a role in shaping the data that is collected and the way in which it is analysed.

#### *4.3.1 Selecting the cases*

One of the first decisions to be made when designing the research was the number of communities to be studied. I had a strong desire to conduct credible ethnographic research, and I recognised from the literature that a study of a single community, with a longer field stay, would likely increase the degree to which I could become embedded into a community and, therefore, increase the depth of insider knowledge that might be gained. However, as has been emphasised above, whilst the objective of employing ethnographic methods was to gain a more nuanced understanding of community life in remote rural Scotland than a quantitative survey or interview has the capacity to do, the aim was not to provide a comprehensive account of the micro-scale idiosyncrasies of a specific place. As identified in the previous chapter, remote rural Scotland should not be regarded as a single, homogeneous region. The Scottish Government (2012a) definition of ‘remote rural’ encompasses communities in very different physical and socio-economic situations across Scotland, from lowland, to highland, to island, with some less than 15 miles from a major city centre and others over 200 miles from the nearest urban area. Although there was never any ambition to generate findings that would be representative of remote rural Scotland as a whole, it seemed important to acknowledge the heterogeneity of this ‘remote rural’ label in the research design by studying more than one community. The PhD was financed by a three-year studentship with a research budget which was estimated would allow for approximately six months of residential fieldwork. It was therefore agreed with the members of the SLRG that I would conduct two-month studies of three different examples of remote rural



communities in Scotland; one island, one highland, and one lowland. This, it was anticipated, would provide a neat set of contrasting field sites to compare findings across. As will be explained below, this original strategy was later revised from three to two cases, primarily for logistical reasons.

The next step in the research design was to identify those communities in remote rural Scotland that had active community-led sustainability initiatives in place. The communities under consideration were limited from the outset to those that had a currently-funded CCF project in place. This was partly the preference of the project funders, the Scottish Government, who finance the CCF and were keen to generate policy-relevant research, but was also largely because it was a pragmatic approach to finding appropriate cases. The diffuse and subjective nature of the terms ‘community’ and ‘sustainability’, coupled with the informal and unpublicised nature of many community-led initiatives, meant that attempting to independently identify all potential case study communities was a task beyond the project’s resources. As the CCF gives support to hundreds of community groups across Scotland to tackle climate change through local, community-led projects, it provided a large pool of potential study sites. Using projects supported by the CCF also set a number of parameters for the cases and helped to solidify the terms of reference for the research, most significantly regarding the definition of a community. The CCF only supports projects which are explicitly ‘community-led’ and therefore requires applicants to define the community involved in the project. This meant that the boundaries of the communities being studied had already been articulated, removing the need for me to navigate the near impossible task of defining examples of ‘communities’ to study. It should be noted that, although the decision to only study projects funded through the CCF was originally considered to be simply one of methodological pragmatism, this choice ended up having a much greater impact on the findings and analysis of this thesis than was ever envisaged at the outset, as the analysis presented in Chapter Seven reveals.

Using the publically-available list of all currently funded CCF projects, I identified those situated in locations classified as ‘remote rural’ according to the Scottish Government (2012a) definition. Once identified, the remote rural projects were then filtered again using the brief project descriptions available online, selecting those which appeared to be actively seeking to encourage more sustainable behaviours within the community, as

opposed to those which were more focused on physical or technical measures (such as, improving the energy efficiency rating of community buildings, or installing renewable energy infrastructure). From this preliminary desk-based research, a short-list of six potential sites was generated which included a range of projects, from schemes to encourage food-growing and bicycle use, to completion of home energy audits, and the development of disused land into a community hub.

I decided that the best way to identify which of these short-listed sites would be the most appropriate for a period of participant-observation would be to undertake a short pilot study, during which I would visit each community and interview at least one of the leading members of the projects. I originally intended to visit all six identified projects, however, during the process of identifying people within the communities to contact, I discovered that the founder of one of the projects had very recently passed away and so I thought it inappropriate to attempt to schedule a visit at that time. Consequently, emails were sent to members of the other five projects giving a little background on the scope of the PhD and asking whether they would be available for interview (see Appendix 1). Four of the projects responded positively, but the final project replied to say that they did not believe that they were in a position at that time to support the long-term objectives of the PhD. Therefore, the short-list was reduced to four possible sites, and dates were set for visits to each. Three of the potential sites were located North West of Edinburgh, therefore, a continuous 10 day field trip was undertaken to incorporate two- to four-day visits to each community. I then returned to Edinburgh and conducted a single day visit to the final site, located in the Southern lowlands.

In addition to assessing the suitability of the short-listed sites and projects, I believed that a pilot study would also be a primitive way of testing my suitability as an ethnographic researcher. It has been acknowledged that an ethnographic approach does not necessarily suit all social researchers (Van Maanen, 2011) and so the pilot study was used to assess my level of ease with using some of the methods in the field, as well as gauge the reception I received locally.

Site visits were carried out between 5<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> June and on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2011, and proved to be an extremely valuable experience. I was greeted warmly in every location, and there was no detectable hostility towards the intentions of my study. I travelled by public transport, which increased my contact with local people, and I found that many

of those I encountered would initiate conversation with me, were interested in my research, and were more than happy to speak informally about their lives and their perceptions of remote rural living.

The interviews conducted with CCF PMs were effective in revealing some of the central priorities for community-led initiatives. It was particularly interesting that economic ambitions featured highly within all the groups' agendas, and, in most cases, environmental issues only contributed part of the groups' motivations (See Appendix 2 for full notes from these interviews). However, of the four locations visited, only one, Arlen Eco Trust (AET)<sup>5</sup> in the Hebrides, emerged as a feasible study site. The other three projects were all concerned that there was insufficient community engagement activity currently ongoing to be of value to the research. This conclusion strongly echoed the findings of the Brook Lyndhurst and Ecometrica (2011) report discussed in the previous chapter, in which it was stated that many CCF projects were found to rely on physical rather than behavioural interventions to secure the carbon emissions reductions required by the CCF. Whilst this is an intriguing observation in itself, and one which is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Seven, the specific focus of this research was to observe first-hand the everyday activities and interactions of a community group attempting to encourage more sustainable behaviours within the wider community. Therefore, the three projects that were not undertaking community engagement activities were eliminated as potential sites, and AET became the first, and only, confirmed case study. Preliminary plans were made to return to Arlen for two months between October and December 2011, when I would volunteer full-time at AET as a participant observer.

As the first site was a Hebridean island, I was keen that the next case study was a mainland example of a remote rural community, and preferably in Southern Scotland. Over the following months, I sought advice on potential study sites from a number of sources, including other CCF groups, Community Energy Scotland, the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (now 'The Conservation Volunteers') and Keep Scotland Beautiful. In almost all cases, a lowland project called 'Thriving Thornton' (TT) was among those recommended. I had visited Thornton during my pilot study but had met

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<sup>5</sup> As noted in Chapter One, 'Arlen Eco Trust' and 'Thriving Thornton' are pseudonyms for the two case study community groups, used to protect the confidentiality of the research participants

with 'Focus on Thornton', a different CCF project running concurrently with 'TT'. In addition to a lack of direct behaviour change projects, the PM of Focus on Thornton had expressed concern that Thornton was not remote or small enough for my investigation. However, having completed the study in the Hebrides, Thornton appeared to be an interesting contrasting example of a remote rural Scottish community. I therefore made contact with the PM of 'TT' in the beginning of March 2012 and, after a positive response and a successful feasibility visit later that month, 'TT' became the second case study, and was conducted between mid-April and mid-June 2012.

After the first two case studies, it became apparent that a third residential visit was not feasible. The full process of fieldwork and preliminary data analysis for each of the first two case studies had taken approximately six months, which left 12 months to conduct and synthesise my analysis across the two cases and to write up. Furthermore, the original estimates for fieldwork costs had transpired to be somewhat optimistic. Neither of the two case study sites had much of a market for rental accommodation beyond holiday lettings, which made the cost of short-term accommodation high in both places. In retrospect, this was to be expected, but it was a factor I overlooked in the initial estimates when the project was designed as a three-case study. Therefore, significant further funding would have needed to be secured in order to conduct a third field stay. Having successfully completed two productive studies which had generated a large quantity of rich data, I decided that a third case would not be necessary, or in the interests of the project. Instead, I decided to use the two-month fieldwork period remaining to conduct a set of additional qualitative interviews with stakeholders in community-led sustainability initiatives outwith my two case studies. More details of these interviews are provided in section 4.7 below.

#### **4.4 Profiles of the selected sites**

As explained in Chapter One, I have chosen to anonymise my case studies to ensure ethical compliance and protect the confidentiality of my participants. Therefore, the following brief profiles of the case study locations are provided to give the reader a basic overview of the nature of the communities in which the research took place and some background information on the community groups themselves.

#### ***4.4.1 Case Study 1: Arlen, Hebridean Island***

The first case study was conducted with Arlen Eco Trust (AET) from October to December 2011. AET is based on Arlendale, an island of approximately 1,300 individuals (General Register Office for Scotland, 2014). However, 'Arlen', the community defined by AET, also includes five adjacent isles linked to Arlendale by causeways, increasing the total target population to approximately 4,500 individuals (General Register Office for Scotland, 2014). The mainland and surrounding islands can be reached daily by ferry from adjacent isles Arlen Mor and Arlen Beg, with the frequency of crossings dependent on the weather conditions and the time of year. There are concentrations of houses, services, and infrastructure around the two ferry ports, but many of the residents are scattered across the islands in small crofting townships.

AET was initiated by a small group of friends who were moved to take action after attending a local screening of 'The Age of Stupid', a film made with the specific intention of motivating people to take action against climate change (see Howell, 2011 for a study investigating the influence of this film on UK audiences). AET secured CCF funding from March 2010 to March 2012, which they used to conduct a range of carbon reduction projects. For example, AET has identified that the soils and climate in Arlen are unfavourable for a lot of crops, which some people had suggested was deterring them from attempting to grow their own food. AET were therefore experimenting with different varieties of fruit and vegetables in different growing conditions to generate recommendations for local people. The other major project underway during my visit was an island-wide home energy audit, in which AET was contacting every resident on the islands offering them a free audit of their home energy use, with recommendations for improving efficiency and reducing energy bills..

#### ***4.4.2 Case study 2: Thornton, Southern Lowlands***

The second case study was conducted from April to June 2012 in Thornton, a southern mainland clustered settlement of just over 2,000 residents (General Register Office for Scotland, 2014). It is situated along a main access route from England to the Highlands of Scotland and, consequently, has a long history of serving English tourists. This continues to be an important part of the local economy, with the majority of residents

employed either in wholesale and retail or in hotels and restaurants (General Register Office for Scotland, 2014).

The CCF organisation, Thriving Thornton (TT), emerged from a small group of individuals who had come together with a shared desire to take action on environmental issues. The original group had started pursuing small-scale projects without funding, including a can collection and recycling service from local pubs and restaurants. As the ambitions of the group began to grow, differing priorities among members led to a few individuals leaving to form a new organisation, TT. Since 2009, TT has been awarded funding from the CCF to carry out an extensive suite of projects on a number of different themes. Their two biggest projects during my fieldwork were a local recycling collection service, where they collected and sorted cardboard, plastic, paper and cans from anyone who requested it, and a community allotment, in which they grew food for sale in the local greengrocers, as well as offering space for members of the community to grow their own food.

#### 4.5 In the field

Although the two groups existed in very different physical and socioeconomic circumstances, they functioned in a similar way. In both cases, the organisational structure was the same: both the groups were set up and overseen by a board of seven unpaid directors, with the day to day running of the project currently being conducted by paid employees funded through the CCF. The groups both operated out of an office located within the geographic community they represented, which is where I was based in both cases. To varying extents, both groups had activities connected with local food growing, community waste reduction and recycling, low carbon transport, and energy efficiency in the home, and both had strong links with schools and young people.

Before entering the field, I assumed that most of the time I volunteered with the CCF group would be 'hands-on' within the community, helping with activities and events to raise awareness of the issues and promote behaviour change. This assumption was also a part of the broader reason for choosing the methodology; I expected that I would be able to use the group as a means by which to access, and gain trust from, members of the wider community so as to explore local understandings and interpretations of sustainable living. However, in reality, a considerable amount of both the groups' time

was spent in the office, and consequently, this is where I, too, spent the majority of my time. Daily interaction with a small group of individuals that being based in an office environment provides enabled me to get to know employees and volunteers quite quickly, building useful relationships and exposing me to the more private workings of the organisations. Furthermore, as both groups had experience of short-term staff, sometimes only employed for a few months at a time, I appeared to be accepted into the office environment with relative ease and speed.

In addition to providing the facilities for typical office activities, such as completing paperwork, sending emails, and taking and making telephone calls, in both cases the office also functioned as a meeting space which meant that both prearranged and unannounced visitors were quite frequent throughout the day, and allowed me access to a wide variety of meetings and discussions.

When able, I recorded observations in a field diary as they happened throughout the day. On occasions when it was not feasible or appropriate to take notes at the time, a summary of the event or interaction was written up as soon as possible. These direct observations were supplemented by a journal that I kept each evening. Here, I reflected on the day's observations and began to draw out the issues and concepts that were arising. This process enabled the focus of the research to gradually become increasingly refined over time.

I conducted eleven qualitative interviews during participant-observation in Arlen (a list of all interviews conducted can be seen in Table 4.1 below). These were with a variety of local people with links to AET, including the AET employees and group members, employees and board members of other community-led groups on the islands, and Local Authority (LA) employees explicitly working on community or environmental issues. The purpose of these interviews was to draw out the respondents' personal experiences and impressions of the work of AET and the central themes of the research. Therefore, interviews were unstructured, following a very loose interview guide based on the ongoing analysis and emerging concepts from the participant-observation, allowing the respondents a large degree of control over the direction of the conversation.

In contrast, only two interviews were conducted in Thornton, one with an employee of TT and one with a member of TT. There were two distinct reasons for this. First,

during my time at TT, I had much more day-to-day contact and conversation with a range of employees and members than I did with AET. In Arlen, I was based almost exclusively in the main office of AET where the opportunity for one-on-one conversations was limited. In Thornton, I split my time between the office, the recycling shed, and the garden, during which time I had informal conversations with almost all members of staff, during which I could ask any questions I had. As the research in Thornton was carried out in late spring, I spent a lot of time volunteering in TT's community allotments, where I met a number of TT's members. I also rented my accommodation from a couple of TT members with whom I had a number of informal chats about TT. Consequently, I only interviewed one part-time TT employee and one TT member.

	Interviewee	Location	Date
1	Community group 3 Project Manager	Highland	Jun 2011
2	Community group 4 Project manager	Island	Jun 2011
3	AET PM*	Arlen	Jun 2011
4	Community group 5 Project Manager	Thornton	Jun 2011
5	Community group 6 Directors	Arlen	Nov 2011
6	LA employee 1	Arlen	Dec 2011
7	AET member 1	Arlen	Dec 2011
8	Crofter	Arlen	Dec 2011
9	Community group 7 Project Manager	Arlen	Dec 2011
10	LA employee 2	Arlen	Dec 2011
11	AET employee 1	Arlen	Dec 2011
12	Community group 8 Project Manager	Arlen	Dec 2011
13	AET member 2	Arlen	Dec 2011
14	AET employee 2	Arlen	Dec 2011
15	AET member 2	Arlen	Dec 2011
16	TT member	Thornton	Apr 2012
17	TT employee	Thornton	Jun 2012
18	AET director 2	Arlen	Feb 2013
19	Former AET Project Manager *	Arlen	Feb 2013
20	CCF manager	Keep Scotland Beautiful	June 2013
21	Community group 11 Project Manager	Highland [phone]	Nov 2013
22	Community group 12 Project Manager	Island [phone]	Nov 2013
23	Community group 13 Project Manager	Lowland [phone]	Nov 2013
24	Community group 14 Director	Island [phone]	Nov 2013
25	Community group 15 Project Manager	Island [phone]	Dec 2013
26	Community group 16 Project Manager	Island [phone]	Dec 2013
27	Community sector network director	Edinburgh	Dec 2013

\* Indicates that the same person was interviewed twice

Table 4.1: List of all interviews conducted



The second significant factor preventing a greater number of interviews in Thornton was the tension and hostility I witnessed between TT and the other CCF group operating in Thornton, 'Focus on Thornton' (FoT), who I had interviewed in my pilot study. I was aware from the pilot interview that there had been some tension in the past between the two groups so, once I had confirmed TT as a case study, I contacted Eileen, the FoT Project Manager (PM), to let her know that I would be in Thornton working with TT and that I would be interested to meet with her again during my stay to learn more about FoT. I didn't receive any response to this email, and the full extent of the hostility between the two groups became apparent upon entering the field. I had arrived in the lead up to a local election in which one of the TT directors was standing for a seat. There had been a local 'hustings' the night I arrived at which a leaflet was handed out by members of FoT, who are strong supporters of an opposing political party, which outlined all the funding that TT had received and suggested that it was being used for personal gain and to promote their political campaign, rather than for the benefit of all Thornton residents. The TT PM explained that those running FoT had convinced a former member of TT staff to take photos of possible health and safety violations in the recycling shed and sent them to the council in an attempt to get TT shut down. It was clear that there were huge personal and political divides between the two groups which, although interesting for my research, made the atmosphere very tense. Somebody connected with FoT came to TT to speak to me and, without me knowing, one of the TT staff turned them away and told them if they didn't leave he would call the police. The following day, I received an email from the Focus on Thornton email address from a local man named Bob Smith (see Appendix 3 for full email exchange with Bob). Bob reiterated much of what was in the hustings leaflet and suggesting that he would like to meet with me. When I told TT that I was interested in meeting with him the PM was concerned and said that I would have to be very careful not to discuss anything about TT with him as they didn't want to let FoT know any of their strategy in case they tried to sabotage TT.

These circumstances made the first couple of weeks of my stay in Thornton quite challenging. In the end, Bob didn't get back to me to arrange a meeting, and I was quite relieved as I didn't want to do anything to compromise my relationship with TT. A fear of jeopardising TT in any way caused me to shy away from meeting with other local organisations. I felt that it would be better to focus on building up a relationship of

trust with TT during the fieldwork period and return to Thornton for follow up interviews with external individuals and organisations if necessary.

## 4.6 Back home

Immediately upon return from each fieldwork period, any interviews were transcribed and, along with all field diary and journal notes, were systematically coded using NVivo software. As initial open coding and writing of ‘memos’ (notes to myself while coding) had been ongoing throughout the fieldwork periods, the process undertaken upon return was one of focused coding, in which the data were analysed according to the most significant codes that had already been identified. By a process of comparing and connecting codes, themes began to emerge. As well as using the software features of NVivo for this, I created diagrams to physically draw connections between memos, codes and categories, an example of which is shown in Figure 4.1. Here, the category was ‘Island’ (indicating issues related specifically to the fact that it was an island community), the sub-categories are ‘Isolation’, ‘Fixed boundary’ and ‘Close-knit community’, everything else is a code, except the memos in the dashed boxes. By mapping these on a diagram, I found it easier to visualise the connections between the observations and analyse the situation more holistically.

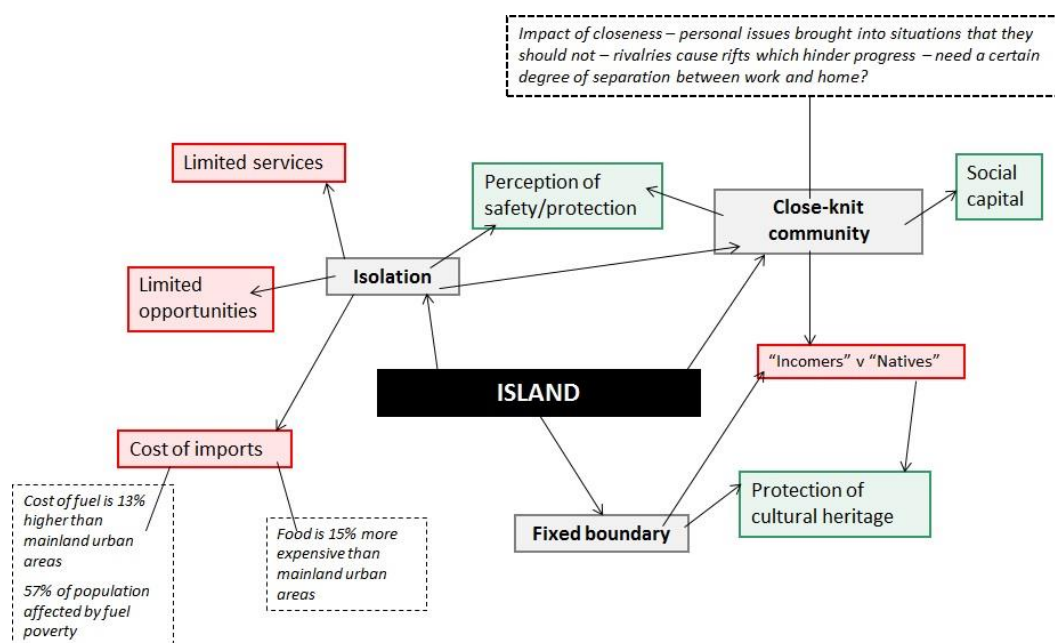


Figure 4.1: Example of spider diagrams used in analysis

Due to the chronology of my fieldwork, the data from Arlen had been analysed before I started participant-observation in Thornton. Therefore, whilst I attempted to analyse each case study separately so as to give as rich and full a picture of each separate case as possible, I was conscious that the themes that had already emerged in Arlen were irrepressibly influencing my perspectives in Thornton. The consequence of this was that few new categories emerged during my time in Thornton, and, therefore, the data collected here are probably most accurately understood as having been gathered through a form of 'theoretical sampling'. As Morgan (2008) explains, "In this process, the tentative conclusions from ongoing analyses serve as the basis for selecting a new set of data sources according to what would be most useful for either building on or challenging those emerging conclusions". For example, as is discussed in Chapter Six (p.119), the distinction between 'incomers' and 'locals' is very obvious in Arlen. Although I found that this divide also exists in Thornton, it is much less readily apparent and, had I visited Thornton first, I am not sure whether I would have picked up on this as quickly as I did.

After all field notes and interview transcripts had been synthesised, coded and categorised, key concepts and theories began to emerge. Although I had been consulting literature throughout my field period, it was at this point, a few months after my return from Thornton, that I started to engage deeply with the literature around each concept in order to better understand how my observations fit with existing knowledge and help to refine my thinking further. Consequently, as explained in Chapter One (p.12), each of my analysis chapters also integrates significant discussion of the existing literature around each theme.

I returned to Arlen for a week in February of 2013, just over a year after I left. This was partly to add a longitudinal element to my research, allowing me to get an understanding of how the group had developed in the 12 months since my original field stay. But it also allowed me to discuss my preliminary concepts and theories with some members of AET and gain some confirmation that my observations were not entirely discordant with their own perceptions. Whilst in Arlen, I conducted interviews with the AET director and the former AET PM, and stayed with an employee of AET. I also attempted to revisit Thornton approximately a year after the initial fieldwork, but was unsuccessful in making contact as, it later transpired, there had been a major change in

management and my two key contacts had left the organisation. As a central reason for my return visit was to reflect on the research process and to discuss my findings with the original participants, I decided not to arrange interviews with the new management.

One of the core theoretical themes to emerge from my analysis centred on a more critical and nuanced understanding of the influence of grant-funding on community-led initiatives (discussed in Chapter Seven). There was particular interest in this analysis when I presented my preliminary findings to the SLRG team and the project funders, and I was granted some extra resources to allow me to explore these issues with a broader lens. There were three specific aims of this additional piece of research; first, to map the current landscape of funding for community initiatives in Scotland to understand how government-funded grant schemes for community-led sustainable development fit into the wider context of support; second, to gather evidence from community-led sustainability initiatives on the suitability and sufficiency of current funding options; and, third, to identify ways in which resources for community activities could be improved in order to make them more fit for purpose.

The research was carried out over an eight-week period and employed a mixed methods approach. The current landscape of funding was mapped through a comprehensive desk-based analysis of the current resource streams available to community initiatives across Scotland. During this, grant funds were categorised according to certain parameters, such as the amount and duration of funding available, the types of projects supported, the application process, and the reporting and monitoring requirements. This allowed funds to be compared and contrasted, so as to identify any key trends and to draw out examples of best practice for funding community-led sustainability projects. Following this, six semi-structured qualitative interviews were carried out with PMs and directors of community-led initiatives in rural Scotland to explore first-hand experiences of funding. In order to identify projects to interview, I searched the published lists of grant recipients for rural-based organisations and picked out those who had been awarded a grant from more than one funding body. From this list, I selected fifteen different groups which appeared to represent a broad range of different types of projects and geographical locations and sent an email to each requesting an interview. I achieved interviews with six of these organisations. It was initially hoped that a greater number of interviews would be achieved. However, the complexity of the funding

landscape was underestimated at the start of the project and the desk-based phase took longer than anticipated, which meant that there was not enough time to follow up potential interviewees or find alternative interview candidates. Despite this, the data collected has revealed some clear and important findings for the improved support of community-led sustainability initiatives, as detailed in Chapter Seven.

The interviews were designed to explore the experiences and perceptions of funding, and determine whether the issues identified through my analysis were specific to the CCF or more generic challenges for community-led sustainability initiatives. The interviews followed an interview schedule (see Appendix 4) which was designed around the findings from Arlen and Thornton and the fund-mapping exercise. As such, data gathered through these interviews were collected according to a more deductive style of research, and, by corroborating my observations, provide additional robustness to my conclusions.

## 4.7 Summary

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to present a narrative of my methodology which illustrates that the research design and direction was not rigidly fixed from the start, but was allowed to mutate and meander as new paths revealed themselves along the way. As explained in this chapter, this was a conscious decision at the start of the project, based on my underlying epistemological and ontological orientation, and I believe that this process has generated a novel perspective on how the unique sociocultural landscape of remote rural communities can influence the challenge of encouraging more sustainable ways of living.

This unique perspective is presented in the ensuing chapters, beginning with the starkest and most problematic issue to emerge throughout the research: the assumption that it is possible to capture and employ the inherently fluid concept of ‘community’ in a locally-delivered project.

# PART II

– *Findings & Analysis* –

# 5 ‘Community’?

*“People are more able to live fulfilling lives and realise their social and economic potential in strong, resilient and supportive communities... It allows more people to contribute to a growing economy, lead healthier, more independent lives and live in a more sustainable way that is better for the environment”*

Scottish Government (2012b: para.1)  
‘National Outcomes: Communities’

Throughout history, humanity has depended upon relationships of mutual support and cooperation between individuals. From an evolutionary perspective, the human propensity for communal living can be explained as an advantageous adaptation which “provides protection, cooperation, competition, and communication to improve the chances for survival” (Bruhn, 2011: 1). But further to these tangible, practical benefits, a community is also thought to answer the social and emotional needs of its members, “among them the need to need one another” (Berry, 2002: 63) and, as such, being part of a community has been identified as a crucial dimension of human existence (Gilchrist, 2009). As discussed in Chapter Two (p.37), it has been argued that the fundamental role that ‘community’ plays in people’s lives means that it has the potential to be powerful tool for encouraging and facilitating more sustainable lifestyles.

However, despite over two hundred years of sociological discourse on the subject, a satisfactory definition of precisely what community *is* remains elusive (Bell and Newby, 1971; Brown and Schafft, 2011). Many argue that the elusiveness of a universal definition stems from the fact that “‘community’ is intrinsically involved in discussion about the proper nature of social organisation, that is to say what society ought to be like” (Plant, 1974: 14), and Plant proposes that the very strong evaluative meaning attached to community makes an explicitly descriptive meaning impossible.

Community is a word which commonly invokes feelings of “warmth, belonging, and comfort” (Evans, 2010: 33) and, consequently, is almost always viewed as something positive (McCarthy, 2005). As Bell and Newby (1971) observe, feelings towards living

in collectives, groups, networks or societies are often mixed, “but the desire to live in a *community* is something that unites even violently conflicting groups in a deeply divided society” (p.xliv, emphasis as original). It has been argued that sentimentality has distorted definitions and understandings to the point that “the romanticism in the rhetoric of community airbrushes out the considerable complexities and contradictions inherent in this set of ideas” (Taylor, 2003: xii). Community feels good, Bauman (2001: 3) suggests, because it is an illusion which “stands for the kind of world which is not, regrettably, available to us – but which we would dearly wish to inhabit”. Consequently, ‘community’ has been condemned as a concept which “obviously comes from wonderland, in that it can mean just what you want” (Smith, 1996: 250).

Following this lack of tangibility, it has been proposed that community is best understood as an inconsistent symbolic social construct, rather than a standardised social unit, with the manifestation of community dependent upon the specific cultural meanings and perceptions of its members (Cohen, 1985). And yet, as demonstrated by the chapter’s opening quotation taken from the Scottish Government’s set of 15 ‘National Outcomes’ (which describe the Government’s key priorities and purpose), community increasingly appears within government ideology and strategy – both as the end goal of policy, and as a means through which other goals might be achieved – as if it has a fixed, self-evident definition (Jewkes and Murcott, 1998; Little, 2002).

The aforementioned literature stirs considerable doubts about whether ‘community’ is a structure or format which can be applied or constructed to achieve government ambitions. Furthermore, the inherent subjectivity in understandings of community raises questions about how consistently the concept being described in these policies is being translated and performed in practice, and whether (government-defined) policy intentions are aligned with the (locally-defined) reality of ‘community’.

The following chapter examines how the concept of community is currently being framed and employed within the CCF, and the potential consequences of this framing on the outcomes of the policies it serves. I begin by discussing the conceptualisation and implementation of ‘community’ in the politics and governmentality of Westminster and Holyrood, and consider some of the criticisms of the use of community as a unit of governance that have been raised by previous authors, particularly Nikolas Rose. I then identify and explain how and why community is currently being employed as both the



*ends* and *means* of sustainability policy, a distinction that is often lost in the broad-brush application of community in this context. This leads into a discussion of the practicalities of employing such a pluralistic concept, in which I examine how the particularly framing of ‘community’ within the CCF (as a necessarily place-based, bounded entity) fits in with the wider literature on community, drawing particularly on Tönnies’s notions of the *Gemeinschaft*. I then discuss how this framing interacts with the role and form of community observed within AET and TT. Whilst both groups were evidently seeking to work in the name of community, only a small proportion of the geographic communities that the groups had been set up to represent were actively participating in their activities. ‘Community’ was found to be inconsistent, subjective and plural, even though geographical boundaries are readily apparent, and ‘communities within communities’ existed in both Arlen and Thornton. Consequently, I argue that, whilst ‘the community’, namely the people of Arlen or Thornton, can justifiably be described as the means by which sustainability goals are being reached, there is a lack of evidence to suggest that the same geographically-defined ‘community’ is being strengthened and empowered by the CCF projects as an end. I suggest that it is in fact AET and TT themselves, as sub-communities of ‘the community’ within which they are working, which are being strengthened by the CCF, through the creation of bonding and linking social capital. I conclude by proposing that this creation of pockets of social capital may in fact be detrimental to the wider community, weakening, rather than strengthening, social sustainability.

### 5.1 The birth of ‘community’ as a political tool

Over the past thirty years, there has been a well-documented shift towards the notion of self-governing communities across many areas of policymaking. This is perhaps epitomised by the current UK Government’s flagship ‘Big Society’ policy. Launched as one of the first major political acts of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition when they gained leadership in 2010, the ‘Big Society’ can be understood as an articulation of the government’s vision for “truly radical localisation” (Featherstone *et al*, 2012: 177; Woolvin and Hardill, 2013). Central to the policy’s discourse is an emphasis on the role and responsibility of the community, as illustrated by the three references to ‘communities’ in the following short excerpt from the Cabinet Office’s document, ‘Building the Big Society’:

*“We want to give citizens, communities and local government the power and information they need to come together, solve the problems they face and build the Britain they want. We want society – the families, networks, neighbourhoods and communities that form the fabric of so much of our everyday lives – to be bigger and stronger than ever before. Only when people and communities are given more power and take more responsibility can we achieve fairness and opportunity for all.”*

HM Government (2010a: 1)

Post-devolution Scotland is largely unaffected by the majority of the localism policy enacted by the UK Government (Painter and Pande, 2013), and the current First Minister, Alex Salmond, has explicitly attempted to distance the Scottish National Party (SNP) strategy from the ‘Big Society’ campaign (Woolvin and Hardill, 2013). However, much of the localism rhetoric and underlying rationale can be seen to be mirrored across Scottish Government policy. The Scottish Government names ‘Communities’ as one of its 16 ‘National Outcomes’, stating as the planned outcome for 2017, “We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others” (Scottish Government, 2012b). This discourse of personal and community responsibility also runs through many of the other National Outcome areas, including: ‘Crime’ (“Our capacity, as individuals, communities and responders...must continually become more flexible, so that it can respond to the unimaginable as well as to the day-to-day”); ‘Public Services’ (“Government will empower local communities and local service providers to work together to develop practical solutions that make best use of all the resources available”); ‘Environmental Impact’ (“Better public understanding needs to be translated into real changes in everyday actions - by businesses, public sector, voluntary and community groups and individuals”); and ‘Independent Living’ (“Supporting and caring for older people is not just a health or social work responsibility - we all have a role to play: families, neighbours and communities; providers of services...”).

This emergence of a ‘new localism’ in UK and Scottish politics can be seen as embedded within a broader, global shift in ‘governmentality’ – understood as ‘mentalities of government’ (Miller and Rose, 1990; Dean, 2010) – which has seen an attempt to move away from a hierarchical, top-down structure of *government* towards a more flexible and inclusive system of *governance*, where responsibility and authority is shared by actors and institutions both within and beyond the state, including individuals

and communities (Stoker, 1998; Rose, 1996; Swyngedouw, 2005; Geddes, 2005; Taylor, 2007).

Mike Geddes commented almost ten years ago that the dominance of governance over government “seems now to be a fact of life for most commentators” (2005: 359), but there is still much debate, scepticism, and uncertainty about the way in which governance works in practice, or even *if* it works in practice (Cochrane, 2010; Stoker, 2011; Fenwick *et al*, 2012). Bell and Hindmoor (2009), whilst acknowledging a shift towards more “networked relations between state and non-state actors”, argue that this does not imply that national governments have stopped being “the ‘cockpits’ from which society is governed” (p.158). Rather, the authors suggest, governments are using these relationships with other societal actors to leverage valuable resources which facilitate the successful implementation of policy and, therefore, the attainment of state objectives.

A consequence of these changes in governance is that institutional arrangements have had to evolve to give “a much greater role in policy-making, administration and implementation to private economic actors” (Swyngedouw, 2005: 1992). This has prompted some commentators to link the rise of governance with what has been dubbed ‘roll-out neoliberalism’, namely, the “construction and consolidation of neoliberalized state forms, modes of governance, and regulatory relations” (Peck and Tickell, 2002: 384). This raises the question of whether the turn to governance, and the emphasis on community-led initiatives (through schemes such as the CCF), is in fact good for sustainability.

The remainder of this section traces the links between the rise of neoliberalism and the emergence of ‘community’ within political discourse.

#### ***5.1.1 The emergence of ‘the community’ in neoliberal governmentality***

According to Peck and Tickell (2002), the origins of the current neoliberal hegemony within global systems of governing can be traced back to an experimental intellectual pursuit of Chicago School economists in the 1970s, from where the abstract notion was “aggressively politicized” (p.380) during “an explicit political-economic project” (p.384) of the 1980s by the Thatcher (UK) and Reagan (USA) governments.

Manifested through a rejection of the Keynesian welfare model and subsequent rolling back of the authority of the state, this approach was aimed at allowing market forces to operate freely, unrestricted and unregulated. Under the conditions of this ‘roll-back neoliberalism’, “social relations were being reconstituted in the image of a brutal reading of competitive-market imperatives...with far-reaching consequences for local political conditions” (Peck and Tickell, 2002: 385). An infamous and telling illustration of the underlying political philosophy of this era was the assertion by Margaret Thatcher, a staunch proponent of personal responsibility and accountability, that there is “no such thing as society” (Thatcher, 1987, cited in Corbett and Walker, 2013: 463).

Nikolas Rose (1996) has argued that this is where the birth of community as a political tool occurred, as the governments of industrialised nations reconfigured the way in which collective experience was conceptualised and administered in response to increasingly globalised economies and the subsequent weakening of the nation state. The notion of ‘the social’ as a nationwide “single matrix of solidarity” (1996: 333) deteriorated, to be replaced by new expectations of allegiance towards one’s immediate personal network or ‘community’. Rose coined this approach “government through community” (1996: 332). Whilst acknowledging that community had been a theme within constitutional thought prior to this point, Rose argues that this shift saw governments start to use community as “a new territory” (p.332) within which to govern:

*“...what began to take shape here was a new way of demarcating a sector for government, a sector whose vectors and forces could be mobilized, enrolled, deployed in novel programmes and techniques which operated through the instrumentalization of personal allegiances and active responsibilities: government through community”*

Rose (1996: 332)

When considering the CCF, it seems somewhat incongruous to suggest that the CCF, the product of a coalition agreement negotiation between the Scottish National Party and the Scottish Green Party (Bolger and Allen, 2013), was intended as a tool of the type of rollback neoliberalism characteristic of the Thatcher Conservative government. A more appropriate framing of the ambition behind the CCF can arguably be found by tracing the evolution in UK governmentality that followed the Thatcher era.

### *5.1.2 From roll-back to roll-out neoliberalism*

The unreserved faith in market forces associated with this period of roll-back neoliberalism is widely considered to fail to account for a great number of market externalities (Peck and Tickell, 2002). However, by the 1990s, neoliberal philosophy and rationale had become hegemonic in global politics. Consequently, when the Labour party regained leadership of the UK Government in 1997, instead of a return to the ‘old Labour’ style of social democracy and state ownership, ‘New Labour’ adopted the ‘Third Way’, a political approach often considered to be the epitome of “roll-out” neoliberalism (Rose, 2000a; Amin, 2005; Peck and Tickell, 2002). It is thought to be through these policies that neoliberal ambitions of economic efficiency and competitiveness permeated – and became normalised within – every spatial scale (Amin, 2005).

The Third Way represented a shift away from the rolling-back, destruction, and dismantlement of social institutions and state interventions, and towards the rolling-out of new modes of socially interventionist governance and regulation. The philosophy of the Third Way has been described as founded in “the interplay between neo-liberalism and neo-communitarianism... stressing the strategic importance of civil society for social cohesion and economic vitality” (Fyfe, 2005: 539). This was manifested in the rolling out of welfare reforms which sought to resolve social inequalities by boosting the economic potential of less prosperous and disadvantaged regions through locally rooted activity. In this way, Amin (2005) argued, “the local has been re-imagined as the cause, consequence, and remedy of social and spatial inequality” (p.614).

Central to this rhetoric was the concept of ‘the community’ as an embodiment of a “subtle elision of the local and the social” (Amin, 2005: 615). In her examination of the political discourse at the time, Ruth Levitas (2000) explains that, although used with “promiscuous flexibility” (p.191), ‘community’ was explicitly identified as a principal organising concept, consciously chosen by New Labour as means of distinguishing the Third Way from both the socialist and individualist politics of the past. Similarly, in a more recent critical review of the use of ‘community’ in New Labour’s urban regeneration policies, Andrew Wallace (2010) observes that ‘community’ was used to counter the previous government’s submission to the will of global economic forces by “embedding programmes in the needs, ideas and resources of local people – often

collectivized as ‘communities’ to be consulted, with their participation ‘activated’ and sense of ‘ownership’ secured” (p.808), as Ash Amin further explains:

*“[Under New Labour,] state-driven universalism has been replaced by a conformist civic particularism, one that expects collective action from communities in particular places and for highly instrumental ends. This new ethic is epitomized by talk of revitalizing social capital, community cohesion, civic responsibility, public spaces, or the third sector”*

Amin (2005: 614-5)

For many governmentality scholars, New Labour’s community ‘activation’ and ‘empowerment’ agenda is therefore interpreted as a neoliberal agenda, which sought to produce “moralized”, “responsibilized”, self-regulating subjects of the state (Clarke, 2005: 451). However, it is important to note at this point that this apparent appropriation of ‘community’ by neoliberalism coincided with the ascent of the sustainable development agenda within global politics, which advocated the facilitation of local-level action as an important component of more sustainable, equitable societies. It is therefore relevant to move on to discuss how these two seemingly opposing ideologies were able to rise to apparent ascendancy simultaneously.

### ***5.1.3 The confluence of neoliberalism and sustainable development***

As discussed in Chapter Two (p.21), following the 1992 UNCED, the UK was one of the first countries to act on its commitment to Agenda 21, introducing a national strategy on sustainable development in 1994, followed up in 1999 with ‘A Better Quality of Life’, a report outlining how the government planned to meet its sustainable development targets (HM Government, 2005). In the Foreword of this document, the prime minister at the time, Tony Blair, states:

*“Now, as we approach the next century, there is a growing realisation that real progress cannot be measured by money alone... we must ensure that economic growth contributes to our quality of life, rather than degrading it. And that we can all share in the benefits.”*

Tony Blair (1999)

The title of this document, and Blair’s words, emphasise the intent within the sustainable development rhetoric to shift away from the pursuit of continued economic growth at any cost, and towards more equitable measures of progress based on ‘quality

of life'. This is directly at odds with the logic of neoliberalism to which the New Labour political agenda has been linked, discussed in the previous section.

This apparent bipolarity within the rationale of politics during this time has been recognised by a number of authors. For example, in an assessment of the urban regeneration initiative, 'Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future', Raco (2005) identified the apparent contradiction in the observation that the dominant influence within New Labour's development strategies was simultaneously being ascribed to the principles of sustainable development, which advocates "equity, empowerment, and environmentally sensitive economic development" (p.324), and to neoliberalism, driven by "market-based entrepreneurialism, social inequality, and resource exploitation" (p.324). At the same time, in North America, McCarthy (2005) made similar observations about the growing political support for community forestry initiatives, noting that, whilst 'sustainability' was often purported as both the rationale and goal of these projects, there was a "remarkable congruence between the rise of community forestry in North America and the ascendance of particular forms of neoliberalism" (p.996). Raco and McCarthy both concluded that it was overly simplistic to categorise these policy agendas as conforming to an exclusively neoliberal ideology. Both described what they witnessed as a form of "hybrid neoliberalism" (McCarthy, 2005: 995), whereby policy could be best understood as the product of a fusion of approaches and rationalities, "some of which can be defined as neoliberal, some of which are drawn from other intellectual, political, and ethical traditions" (Raco, 2005: 343).

If it is accepted that current political strategy, including schemes such as the CCF, is best understood as "hybrid assemblages of governing" (Lockie and Higgins, 2007: 2) which blend ambitions of social and environmental sustainability with the pursuit of economically 'rational' practices, the question remains as to whether this is an effective political approach for achieving sustainability goals. The following section moves on to look in more detail at the role that 'community' plays within current sustainability policy.

## 5.2 'Community' as the means and ends of sustainability policy

The CCF was established with three central aims: to "help communities to significantly reduce their carbon emissions; empower Scottish communities by building the capacity for sustained future reductions; [and] promote greater awareness of the action Scottish

communities can take to reduce their emissions” (Gunn, 2008: 3). These aims pivot on the assumption that communities should be actively engaged in meeting sustainable development goals, which is the fundamental premise behind a growing trend towards community-based initiatives within UK and Scottish Government sustainable development policy.

‘Community’ can be seen as playing two, interconnected roles within the sustainability policy rhetoric. Often, community is framed as a site or scale at which to deliver a particular sustainability goal, for example, a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. These types of community-based interventions can include technical measures, such as improving household energy efficiency or installing micro-renewables, and behaviour changes, such as increasing recycling or reducing car use. Here, the community is the *means* by which a particular sustainability intervention is realised. However, the fostering of ‘community’, in itself, can also be considered a goal, or *end*, of sustainability policy. Sustainable development is usually perceived to be a tripartite concept, bringing together ‘environment’, ‘economy’ and ‘society’, either as a system of three interlocking circles or as three supporting pillars. Therefore, encouraging and strengthening ‘community’, and the social networks and social cohesion it implies, may be seen as contributing towards socially sustainable development (Lehtonen, 2004). This remainder of this section expands on these two roles and discusses how sustainability policy, such as the CCF, often seeks to address both simultaneously.

#### ***5.1.1 Community as a ‘means’***

As explained in Chapter Two (Section 2.3, p.37), there is evidence that the community scale is an effective level at which to encourage and deliver pro-environmental action and emissions reductions (Middlemiss, 2011a, 2011b; Heiskanen *et al*, 2010; Preston *et al*, 2009). There are a number of key reasons why ‘community’ may be a particularly useful conduit for delivering sustainability goals. First, this may be an effective scale at which to communicate messages about climate change. Partially because individuals are more likely to trust information that comes from community peers as opposed to politicians, the media or local authorities (Reeves *et al*, 2011), but also because the physical environment is observed to become most meaningful to people when it engages and interacts with social life and human relationships. Consequently, by framing environmental problems at a level at which individuals have a personal, lived experience



of the natural world, there is increased potential to connect with individuals' concern for nature and encourage pro-environmental choices (Macnaghten, 2003).

Second, it is believed that “the community” itself is a powerful vehicle for delivering the right social context to encourage pro-environmental behaviour. The “social organisation” of communities, which includes the construction and maintenance of certain descriptive and injunctive norms, is believed to be a key influence on behaviour and lifestyles (Peters and Jackson, 2008).

Third, the community scale has been identified as an important site for social and technological innovation and experimentation, where alternative solutions for sustainable development can emerge outside of the mainstream. Community-led initiatives can foster innovations that are more tailored to the interests and values of the communities in question (Seyfang and Smith, 2007).

### *5.1.2 Community as an ‘end’*

Although sustainable development is characterised as a triad, historically, much greater attention has been focused on understanding and achieving the environmental and economic aspects of sustainability than the social aspect. This arguably stems from the fact that sustainable development has predominantly been applied within either the environmental movement or a business context, where there is an evident bias towards either an environmental or economic agenda respectively (McKenzie, 2004). However, there is increasing recognition of the role that social factors play in achieving sustainable development ambitions. In addition to addressing environmental concerns, sustainable development “...is also about the pursuit of fundamental social, economic and cultural objectives. These objectives include the need to secure basic human needs, equity, social justice and cultural diversity” (Barker, 2005: 12).

A conceptualisation of ‘social sustainability’ theory and policy has now started to develop (Cuthill, 2010) but has done so in a hazier, less agenda-driven way than notions of environmental or economic sustainability, reflected in a slightly chaotic discourse and a plurality of connotation (Vallance *et al*, 2011). One way of conceptualising the social aspects of sustainability that has gained significant traction within policymaking, academia, and practice has been the notion of ‘community resilience’, as Cinderby *et al* (2014) explain:

*“Communities are subject to constant adjustments from internal (demographic, skills) and external (environmental, economic, technological, governmental) drivers of change. A community’s resilience will determine its ability to successfully mobilise and respond to these drivers, and is therefore integrally related to community and social sustainability.”*

Cinderby *et al* (2014: 51)

Barr and Devine-Wright (2012: 526) observe that “...resilience has become an important and inseparable part of the sustainable communities agenda in developed nations”. Whilst community resilience is still somewhat of an abstract concept (Steiner and Markantoni, 2014), the social organisation of communities and, specifically, the social capital thought to exist within them, is frequently highlighted as a critical element of both resilience and sustainability (Peters and Jackson, 2008; Putnam, 2000; Pretty and Ward, 2001; Dale and Newman, 2008; Magis, 2010).

Often described as “the glue that holds society together” (Fedderke *et al*, 1999: 710), social capital is most commonly defined as “networks, together with shared norms, values and understanding, which facilitate co-operation within or among groups” (Cote and Healy, 2001: 41). It can be understood as consisting of four central elements: relations of trust; reciprocity and exchanges; common rules, norms and sanctions; connectedness, networks and groups. These aspects create a social structure which gives individuals the “confidence to invest in collective activities, knowing that others will also do so” (Pretty and Ward, 2001: 211). Social capital is distinguished from physical and human capital by the fact that it is not found within tools of production or within individuals themselves, but exists in the relations between actors. Social capital is therefore created through changes to these relations which facilitate more productive action (Coleman, 1988).

Sustainability policy therefore often seeks to find and foster social capital to build community resilience, increasing the capacity of the community to respond and adapt to change, including environmental stress and shock (Magis, 2010; Cinderby *et al*, 2014).

### ***5.1.3 A means to an end***

The two roles of community described above are often considered to be linked in a mutually reinforcing relationship: employing communities in the delivery of

sustainability initiatives is thought to be an effective way to draw out, harness and build social capital, increasing the community's capacity to act (Walker *et al*, 2010) and creating a positive feedback loop whereby communities are empowered to pursue further local projects in the future (Assadourian, 2008).

Dale and Newman (2006) present evidence to demonstrate how community resilience can be built through establishing community-led sustainability initiatives. Drawing on findings from a case-study of a Vancouver-based community-led recycling initiative, 'United We Can', Dale and Newman observe:

*"All three imperatives of sustainable development were strengthened through this effort [the 'United We Can' initiative]; the amount of waste diverted from landfills was increased, contributing to the ecological imperative, a stronger social network was formed, aiding the social imperative, and the income stream for a very disadvantaged group was improved, aiding the economic imperative."*

Dale and Newman (2006: 25)

The CCF, which specifically supports 'community-led projects' and incorporates the aforementioned aims of community empowerment and capacity building, can be seen as a prime example of this rationale within policy-making. However, translating this theory into practice is widely reported to be complicated and challenging (Collins, 2004).

Although Dale and Newman (2006) observed that the 'United We Can' initiative achieved a number of positive outcomes for sustainable development, they concede that, "The long term success of this group and the community it represents remains to be seen" (p.25).

Arguably, one of the most significant challenges in any policy employing notions of community is the inherent subjectivity of what constitutes a community. The following section discusses my observations and analysis of the particular way in which community is understood and employed within the CCF.

### 5.3 Community in the CCF

Community is clearly central to the CCF. As discussed in Chapter Three, the criteria of the CCF have always stated that, in order to be eligible for support, both the project proposed and the group proposing it must be shown to be "led by the community" (KSB, no date(1): para.2). That 'community' is a tangible entity which is able to lead a

project is an undisputed, implicit assumption of the scheme. However, the CCF, in common with much political and policymaking dialogue, does not offer an explicit definition of what is meant by a ‘community’ (Bulkeley and Fuller, 2012).

This apparent assumption that ‘community’ is a concept with a self-evident meaning is comprehensively undermined by George Hillery’s 1955 review of the existing definitions of the term. Hillery identified a sample of 94 different definitions. Arguably, the sheer number of different definitions alone starkly illustrates the lack of consensus about what ‘community’ is. Even more revealing, however, was the conclusion that, across those 94 definitions, the only definitive feature that could be identified as common to all was that “community involves people” (1955: 117).

Almost 60 years on from Hillery’s publication, many more separate attempts have been made to distinguish the less tangible aspects of community, each imbued with their own idiosyncratic interpretations and observations (Bell and Newby, 1974; Bhattacharyya, 2004). Perhaps in an attempt to avoid these thorny and controversial debates, and to keep the scheme open to various understandings and enactments of ‘community’, the CCF does not articulate an official allegiance towards any particular definition. The closest the CCF comes to revealing any expectations of the form that a community should take is provided within the website’s ‘FAQs’ section, in answer to the question “How do you [the CCF] define a community group?”:

*“Community groups come in many shapes and sizes. CCF supports community groups which draw their membership from, and focus their activities on, a clearly defined geographical area. We can also consider applications from communities of interest where they can be defined in terms of geography...”*

KSB (no date (2): para.11)

This extract demonstrates that, whilst the CCF ostensibly recognises that community groups may take many forms, including ‘communities of interest’ (which do not necessarily depend upon a shared geography), it simultaneously explicitly demands that a group’s definition of their ‘community’ is closely tied to a particular physical locality. The assumption within the CCF that a ‘community group’ will represent the wider, geographically-defined ‘community’ in which it operates was reflected in the two projects I studied. Thriving Thornton and Arlen Eco Trust, in line with the vast majority of CCF-funded groups, include a specific place within the name of the group

itself, clearly illustrating an association with that particular ‘community’. This interpretation of community, as a “local, reified, place-based” concept (Taylor Aiken, 2014: 12) has had a long and persistent presence, and is arguably most famously depicted by Ferdinand Tönnies’s in his landmark text, *‘Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft’*, first published in 1887.

### **5.3.1 Community as *Gemeinschaft***

Tönnies is often credited as the founding father of the concept of ‘community’ as a keystone theme of sociology, identifying two polarised ‘ideal types’ of human association: *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. *Gemeinschaft*, most commonly translated as ‘community’, is found “wherever human beings are related through their wills in an organic manner and affirm each other” (Tönnies, 1935/1955: 48). Tönnies describes this “unity of human wills” as an “original or natural condition” (1935/1955: 42) which can be found in three forms: community of blood (or kinship), place (or neighbourhood), and mind (or friendship). In the *Gemeinschaft*, there is a tacit shared understanding among all members such that membership of the community is considered self-evident (Bauman, 2001), and it is this shared understanding which binds members together. Tönnies identified *Gemeinschaft* as typically being exhibited most strongly in the home and, to a lesser extent, the traditional village or small town, where “family life is the general basis of life” (1935/1955: 267). In contrast, the *Gesellschaft*, usually translated as ‘society’ or ‘association’, describes “the artificial construction of an aggregate of human beings which superficially resembles the *Gemeinschaft*” (Tönnies, 1935/1955: 74). Whilst individuals live together peacefully, they are alienated, linked to one another only through rational relationships based on their roles in society (Bradshaw, 2008). Rather than membership being innate or tacit, individuals interact in a way which has been calculated as an efficient means by which to meet their own goals (Nilsson and Hendrikse, 2011). As Tönnies states, in the *Gesellschaft*, “nobody wants to grant and produce anything for another individual, nor will he be inclined to give ungrudgingly to another individual, if it be not in exchange for a gift or labor equivalent that he considers at least equal to what he has given” (1935/1955: 74). *Gesellschaft* is considered to be most clearly expressed in a large industrial city or metropolis, where “numerous external contacts, contracts, and contractual relations only cover up as many inner hostilities and antagonistic interests” (Tönnies, 1935/1955: 266).

The face-to-face interaction between individuals living in close proximity to each other can facilitate the building of social norms and networks (Bridger and Alter, 2006), as individuals who share a common area of land are likely to also share common institutions and common problems and, therefore, share common perspectives (Minar and Greer, 1969). This type of interaction requires a place where the physical boundaries are well defined and the population is relatively homogeneous, typical of the small rural villages of the nineteenth century that Tönnies's observed (Bridger and Alter, 2006). It has been suggested that the *Gemeinschaft*-type community is derived and maintained in rural locations from the performance of specifically rural activities. As Woods (2010: 836) argues, "the practices and performances of rural actors in material settings contribute to the production and reproduction of discourses of rurality", which provides a sense of belonging through a deep engagement with the particular physical place in which the community is located. For example, activities connected to crofting are thought to maintain links to a shared cultural history, reinforcing community bonds. Both Thornton and Arlen can be seen to closely fit this description of a community. The islands of Arlen, being surrounded by water, have immediately obvious physical boundaries; as one AET PM remarked, "*you're either on or you're off*" (Research Diary, Arlen). Thornton, although not surrounded by water, is a small nucleated settlement which is surrounded by hills and farmland that clearly define the settlement boundary. In addition, traditional rural practices are still ongoing in both places. In Arlen, there was evidence that crofting still plays a significant role in fostering a bond between individuals and the physical environment. For example, one member of the AET team, Callum, was born in Arlen and moved to Glasgow to work in television production in his twenties, but when his father died he felt compelled to move back to take over the family croft, as the following extract illustrates:

*"Callum<sup>6</sup> said that he feels great loyalty to the croft and he would never want to sell it. He said that loyalty to the croft is the only reason he is living here 'with 10 smelly sheep'"*

Research Diary, Arlen

Whilst Thornton doesn't have the crofting tradition of Arlen, there was still evidence that traditional rural activities serve to foster a sense of belonging. For example, during

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<sup>6</sup> For purposes of participant confidentiality, all names used in this thesis are pseudonyms.

my time at TT the nominations for ‘Shepherd and Shepherd’s Lass’ were ongoing. This is a longstanding annual tradition in Thornton, in which a member of the community is elected as a local representative, originally to ride around the boundaries of the settlement to ensure the border was secure. It was clear that this is still an important role for local people, generating a lot of discussion in the days leading up to the nominations. A member of the TT staff had been elected into the role in the past and when I asked her some questions about it she went home to collect an album full of photos and newspaper clippings, and told me how proud she was of representing Thornton during that year.

### 5.3.2 Place attachment

This connection between individuals and their environment can be described as ‘place attachment’ (Scannell and Gifford, 2010). As with ‘community’, the notion of place attachment is a multifaceted one that has been variously applied and defined within many different contexts and disciplines. Based on a review of the literature, Raymond *et al* (2010) have constructed a ‘three-pole, four-dimensional’ model of place attachment, shown in Table 5.1.

Pole	Dimension	Definition
Personal	Place identity	Those dimensions of self, such as the mixture of feelings about specific physical settings and symbolic connections to place, that define who we are.
	Place dependence	Functional connection based specifically on the individual physical connection to a setting; for example, it reflects the degree to which the physical setting provides conditions to support an intended use.
Community	Social bonding	Feelings of belongingness or membership to a group of people, such as friends and family, as well as the emotional connections based on shared history, interests or concerns.
Environment	Nature bonding	Implicit or explicit connection to some part of the non-human natural environment, based on history, emotional response or cognitive representation (e.g., knowledge generation).

**Table 5.1: The four dimensions of place attachment**  
Source: Adapted from Raymond *et al* (2010: 426)

The model is useful in identifying the overlap between community and place attachment, namely in the social bonding between the people living in a particular place. However, according to this model, the type of place attachment demonstrated in the two examples from my case studies given above are examples of ‘place identity’, a

dimension stemming from a personal, rather than community, attachment. This was characteristic of both communities, with stronger evidence found of personal and environmental place attachment than community-orientated attachment. There was, in fact, significant evidence that the shared rural practices which have historically been considered important in bonding local people together in these two places, are in terminal decline, as the following two extracts illustrate:

*Adrian asked Callum at lunch about the future of crofting and whether he thought it would survive. Callum said he didn't think so. He said one of the things he has noticed is that people don't come and offer you help like they used to. Emma agreed and said it used to be the case that everyone would come over and help, for example, they would help you cut your peat, you would make them dinner, and then they would go to the next person's house the next day. But she said that you don't get that anymore...*

Research Diary, Arlen

*Historically [Thornton] had over 20 employed men as shepherds and farmhands, with their families working in the big houses or taking over from their fathers on the land. Now there are just a couple of employed men in the valley and most properties belong to people who make their living in outside businesses... My children enjoy living here but are not going to stay; they will pursue different lives in music and drama with better contact to the outside world which I am proud of... I don't know what our future will be, it is not possible to make a living on a small farm now and trying to gets in the way of trying to make a living in any other way, losing time and money.*

Interview: James, Thornton

Both Callum and James suggest that the traditional forms of agriculture in Arlen and Thornton respectively are under significant threat of extinction, with few people still sharing in these traditional practices, even family members. Therefore, if understandings of community are based on Tönnies's conception of the *Gemeinschaft*, the observed, and well-documented, disintegration of traditional rural ways of life would suggest that community itself is disintegrating within society.

### **5.3.3 Community lost?**

The majority of the global population now inhabit urban areas, and individual work lives have become much more variable over time and space. Individuals are now likely to change both their place of work and their skills set many times throughout their lives (Sennett, 1998) and are often required to move for work, making it difficult and unlikely



for them to remain in the same ‘community’ for long enough to develop strong social ties (Bridger and Alter, 2006).

Consequently, some have argued that, for most people, there is no longer such a thing as community “because people no longer have long-standing personal local connections which continue over generations, and...people now have much wider, transitory and impersonal connections (including through computer technology)” (Warburton, 1998: 15). Contemporary culture is thought to have become a ‘culture of separation’, borne from the emergence of a diversity of beliefs of the meaning of life, and that, within modern liberal democracies, freedom and autonomy have taken precedence, spawning an endless search for personal identity, undermining the overall purpose of society, and making it difficult to see how individual experiences fit together to form a meaningful whole, or how individual lifestyle choices make a difference for the common good. These social changes have cemented some views of community as an idealised notion of how society used to be, and should be, where higher levels of primary bonding lead to inherent altruism (Etzioni, 1996). As such, the ‘community’ of the *Gemeinschaft* has come to represent some notion of the rural idyll and the illusive ‘good life’.

Whilst still hugely influential, Tönnies, and the concept of community he inspired, has been criticised for displaying a romanticised, value-laden notion of traditional, pre-industrial life, resulting in a pejorative framing of the transition from rural to urban and the associated dissolution of community in modern society. This approach reveals a subjective judgement of a particular form of human relations as preferable and superior to another. It has been argued that this perception has driven the contemporary quest to actively seek out and revive community. As Bridger and Luloff (2001) suggest, “In an increasingly fragmented and uncertain world, the search for geographically based community becomes a means of exerting some control over at least a portion of one’s life.” (p.460). It can be argued that the CCF is part of this quest, seeking as it does, to identify and support place-based, geographically-bounded ‘communities’. However, Bell and Newby (1974) contend that such subjective notions of the traditional community, and the unqualified assumption that it is an inherently good thing, have served to confuse our understanding of what community actually is. Rather than being lost, it is argued that community has been transformed to fit the modern world, “liberated” from a reliance on one’s immediate residential context (Wellman, 1979; Brown and Schafft,

2011). The relative ease and speed with which individuals can now travel and communicate across large distances as a result of technological innovation means that physical proximity is not the only means by which bonds of solidarity, and therefore ‘community’, can form (Bradshaw, 2008).

Following these observations, it has been suggested that “...the resuscitation of dying forms of communal solidarity is neither possible nor desirable. People are not going to return to unquestioned loyalties of family or religion or locality...” (Phillips, 1999: 108). Place is just one of the things that can elicit a sense of community, and determining ‘the community’ according to geography alone “insufficiently addresses...the heterogeneity of communities within communities” (Stone and Nyaupane, 2013: 28).

#### 5.4 Communities within communities

The fact that ‘Arlen’ is comprised of several islands was perhaps the starkest example of the existence of ‘communities within communities’. The definition of ‘Arlen’ is plural in itself – some people use ‘Arlen’ or ‘the Arlens’ to refer to the three largest islands of Arlen Beg, Arlen Mor and Arlendale, whilst others, including AET, incorporate the isles of Upper Arla and Lower Arla. There is over sixty miles between the most northerly and southerly tips of the five islands, and each can be thought of as having a distinct personality and a community in themselves, as the following two interview extracts demonstrate:

*“...when I talk about community, you know, I suppose I’m just talking about Arlendale itself rather than out-with – I think we just quietly go about our day to day lives. I often feel that we’re not very good at fighting as a community for things that we believe in. And that we like to take a back seat and leave it to other people who are maybe more vocal and willing to fight on our behalf.”*

Interview: Emma, resident of Arlendale, Arlen

*Emily: “And in terms of the community, do you think this is a cohesive community? Do you think they’re united?”*

*Laura: “Um, no [laughs]. I’ve seen ones that are more united, but I don’t think any com–  
many communities are absolutely united about what they’re doing. I think this one’s no different from any other. In a way, it depends which community you’re talking about, because some people feel that they’re part of Arlen Mor and Arlendale, some people, if you’re in Arlendale, feel more towards Arlen Beg. There doesn’t seem to be a really set community. It’s easy if you’re in Lower Arla or Upper Arla to say*

*where you're from, but it's not so much when you're Arlen, it just depends. And I think Arlendale really doesn't have a community. At least people in Arlen Mor feel an affinity to Arlen Mor, and Arlen Beg have got a very strong Arlen Beg identity, but I don't think we've got that in Arlendale just because it's in the middle."*

Interview: Laura, resident of Arlendale, Arlen

The boundaries of communities were observed to be fluid and personal, and incorporated many more factors than just geography:

*Kirsty: "Well, there are so many levels to it ['community'], I guess. There's obviously the Gaelic-speaking – even that in itself, when you say there's Gaelic speakers and non-Gaelic speakers that seems on the face of it to be a simple distinction, but even in that level of saying that there's people who speak Gaelic and don't speak Gaelic becomes a very multi-layered, complex thing. There are people who go to church and people who don't, but again, you know, there's different churches, different kind of relationships and things. So there's nothing – then there's the whole issue of land ownership and the buyout, in Arlen Mor anyway, where five years on the whole notion of us [pause] 'taking control and ownership of our destinies' and things, which is such a powerful thing that everybody kind of thought they wanted to do, has now become a much more complicated story."*

Interview: Kirsty, Local Authority Community Co-ordinator, Arlen

These extracts undermine any notion that having a distinct geographical boundary makes the definition of 'community' straightforward. Not only was there sub-division of 'the community' by according to smaller-scale geographical boundaries, but various other complex divisions were observed to exist according to, for example, religion, language, and land ownership. However, the most striking example of 'communities within communities' in both Arlen and Thornton was that of 'incomers' or 'white settlers', and 'locals':

*I said that I'd noticed that when I've spent time with him [Craig]; that he refers to people as 'white settlers' and there's a clear divide between them and locals. She said yes, but also that it is not a nasty thing with him, it's just that his circle of friends are all locals.*

Research Diary, Thornton

The influence of this distinction between 'incomers' and 'locals' on the CCF groups was a major observation throughout my research and, as such, will be discussed in depth in the following chapter, but the presence of 'communities within communities' is not

unusual. As Halseth (1993) notes, there is often evidence of clear social and spatial divisions within communities externally defined as single entities. If it is accepted that the concept of the traditional, place-based community is no longer fit for modern society, significant questions arise as to how the ascription of a place-based interpretation of community within the CCF interacts with actual enactments of community. However, there is a distinct absence of any acknowledgment within the CCF of the way in which these sub-communities interact with a community group's ability to mobilise the geographical community in which they operate. Therefore, the following section explores my observations of the role that community played in AET and TT.

## 5.5 The role and form of community in AET and TT

As explained in the preceding sections, the CCF supports communities via requests from self-selected 'community groups'. In an interview, a Keep Scotland Beautiful employee identified three major categories of community groups that tend to approach the CCF; Green Activist Groups, Community Regeneration Groups, Project-Specific Groups (e.g. Village Hall Association). Both AET and TT are most closely aligned with the first category, Green Activist Groups, having both been created through the strong desire of a few individuals to take environmental action in their local area.

Arlen Eco Trust first began in 2009 following a screening of *The Age of Stupid* at a film night at the local arts centre. After a Q&A session, the audience collectively decided to form what became Arlen Eco Trust:

*"...it was just the people who saw that film – there were only about 15 people who turned up to it. The film ended and we all sat there and said, 'For god's sake, we've got to do something about this. We can't watch something like this and not doing anything'. So it was born out of a feeling that we have to do something"*

Interview: John, AET Chairman, Arlen

Five of those audience members, plus a local Community Energy Scotland project officer, formed the Board. After holding a few meetings, they discovered the CCF and decided to apply. They were successful, and received £82,420 in March 2010 to fund their first 'Carbon Neutral Arlen' project.

Thriving Thornton, also constituted in 2009, is primarily driven by two Thornton residents with very strong ties to the Scottish Green Party: Polly and Hugh Bower. Hugh and Polly were originally involved with a different grassroots group in Thornton offering a small-scale recycling service, which included collecting aluminium cans from pubs and restaurants. However, as this group started to develop, there was a clear divide in the members' longer-term agendas, and they split into two separate organisations: Focus on Thornton and Thriving Thornton. Thriving Thornton's first project was a public engagement and education project around carbon emissions reduction for which they were granted £98,415 by the CCF in January 2009.

During my research, both AET and TT were resolute in their desire for 'the community', as opposed to individuals, to benefit from the work they were doing. Towards the end of my stay in Thornton, I spent an afternoon with the TT PM, Hugh, and we talked a little about what it meant for TT to be a 'community' organisation:

*...Hugh said that the main reason he wanted to ensure that the group was a 'community' group was so that, no matter what happened, the community would always benefit from the success of the organisation, never one individual, or group of individuals.*

Research Diary, Thornton

While in Arlen, I accompanied Adrian and Emma on one of the house energy surveys AET were conducting as part of the CCF project. The following extract is from a recording of a five minute introduction to the project that Adrian gave to the couple living in the house before beginning the survey, and illustrates the central role that helping 'the community' had in of all the work that AET were doing:

*"What we're trying to do, we're surveying to try to help the whole community. That's the aim of our project... I think it's the first time it's been done anywhere in Britain, where a whole community looks at its own houses and then we can go and provide the authorities, or the agencies, with the information... So, just to reflect on being here, we are working on a community project, rather than you individually"*

House Survey Meeting: Adrian, AET PM, Arlen

Dennis E. Poplin has identified this type of community action, the primary purpose being "the initiation of change at the community level through the mechanism of orderly group processes", as 'initiated community action' (1972: 187). This is in contrast to what Poplin defined as 'spontaneous community action' (such as a strike) or

‘routinized community action’ (such as an annual parade). Poplin suggests that ‘ideal’ initiated community action has three central characteristics: it seeks to solve a particular problem or reach a particular goal; it involves the voluntary participation of local people and institutions; it has a democratic organisation, in that, “the participation of all interested, conscientious citizens should be welcomed... [and they] should be involved in setting goals, planning for action, and carrying the project through to completion” (1972: 189). Each of the two community groups studied ostensibly met all three of Poplin’s ‘ideal type’ characteristics. Each group was set up to reduce local carbon emissions, each had input from volunteers, most notably on the Board of Directors, and each had an open membership policy and held regular public consultation meetings, with the CCF explicitly requiring all community groups to demonstrate that they have significant local support:

*“Applicants should be able to demonstrate how the proposal has grown out of local interest/ activity and how members of the community who will be involved in the activities have been consulted to demonstrate the local demand for each of the activities proposed”*

KSB (no date(2): para.11)

Both AET and TT used group membership numbers as a way of demonstrating that they, as a group, represent a significant portion of the community. For both groups, membership was free and open to all residents of the community that the group was set up to represent. At the time of research, AET had approximately 150 members and TT had 190 members, suggesting significant local support. Both TT and AET provided services that were being used by their members. For example, both had created community allotments, including poly-tunnel spaces, which were being used to grow food. In Arlen this was free of charge, in Thornton members had to pay a £50 annual fee. I met allotment holders in both projects and it was clear that they were getting tangible benefits from these projects:

*“I just saw an advert [from AET] saying ‘Looking for people to take a plot in the greenhouse’... and, yeah, it was great...[last year] we were able to do tomatoes, cucumbers, chillies, aubergine, which was trial and error really, and just a few other green bean type things. So, it was just an experiment for us, but it worked fine... it’s just a hobby, but it’s a hobby that gives you results that you can eat, which is good”*

Interview: Daisy, AET member, Arlen

*She [one of the allotment holders] got involved in TT because she downsized to a smaller cottage just up the road which doesn't have a garden and she really missed it, and then she heard about the TT allotments and put her name down immediately and has been involved since the start. She said she loves it.*

Research Diary, Thornton

However, it was only a small number of residents of Arlen and Thornton who made use of the facilities that the groups were providing. For example, there were 15 allotment holders in Thornton at the time of the research, and just five in Arlen. Consequently, in both cases, it was evident that group membership was not a proxy for active participation in the groups' activities or future direction, and membership carried no responsibility or commitment to the group.

## 5.6 The 'membership' mirage

One illustration of the inconsistency between 'membership' and active participation in furthering the groups' ambitions was the low attendance numbers for public consultation meetings during the respective research periods: a general meeting held by AET was attended by just six people, whilst TT's consultations about a proposal for a new local car club didn't attract anybody to the first meeting, and just three attended the second one. Certain employees or friends of the group may be motivated to attend public meetings simply to "show support", regardless of their commitment to, or interest in, the project in question, as the following journal extract illustrates:

*I walked out with Janet [a TT employee] after work. She was saying that she better go along to the Car Share event tonight to show support. I asked if she thought she would use it [a car club]. She said no because she had a car. I asked if she would ever consider getting rid of her car if there was a car share scheme. She said probably not, she likes the freedom of having a car.*

Research Diary, Thornton

In both these cases, there were a number of legitimate factors that were named as likely reasons for a low turn out to the meetings, including, bad weather, clashes with other local events, and lack of publicity. Of course, a low attendance at public meetings does not necessarily mean that the residents of the local neighbourhood disapprove of what the group is doing, as the following statement from an AET PM suggests:

*She [AET PM] said that it's frustrating trying to prove that they [AET] have community support because so much of it is informal – people just saying stuff to them in the shop, for example, rather than participating in formal meetings or surveys.*

Research Diary, Arlen

However, it does raise questions about the extent to which the local residents are contributing to the changes that the groups are trying to make. At the time of research, both AET and TT had Boards of Directors made up of seven volunteers from the local area. In addition to this, I met two other regular volunteers at TT; one retired resident who occasionally helped in the garden, and one volunteer who worked with the recycling team every day in order to meet the conditions of a criminal sentence. AET did not have any active volunteers beyond the Board members at the time of my research.

There is evidence from other studies of community action to suggest that this is a ubiquitous problem for groups trying to engage widely with geographically-defined communities. As Bridger and Luloff (2001) note, the promotion of grassroots sustainable development action assumes “a very active conception of community – one in which communities possess a relatively complete table of social organisation and the ability to mobilize for collective long-term action” (p.463). It has been suggested that the very notion of community-led development is romantic, misguided and naïve. Rowe and Robbins (2000) argue that, whilst often perceived to be both representative and accountable, community groups are usually neither. This argument was supported in an interview with a Community Energy Scotland (CES) Development Officer based in Arlen who relayed her experience of some community groups ‘forgetting’ to engage the community:

*“Some of the groups... sometimes their individual egos can get in the way a bit...they really want to deliver it for themselves and they’re forgetting to actually take the community with them...”*

Interview: Laura, Development Officer, CES, Arlen

The lack of volunteers at AET was raised by KSB at a CCF conference during my research period, and this prompted the Local Development Officer working with AET to express some concern that the group did not engage fully with local people:



*Isla [AET PM] was on the phone to John [AET Chairman] talking about conversations with KSB [about their CCF application] at the 'CCF Gathering' and how KSB had said that a lot of other organisations involved a lot of volunteers... Callum [LDO] and I walked into the other room and he said quietly to me that he was glad that point had been made as he has often felt that the organisation does not involve the local community*

Research Diary, Arlen

The leaders of both the CCF groups studied demonstrated a lack of confidence in the role of community participation in achieving the goals of the group. In Arlen, there were signs of fatigue with the process of community engagement, with the AET chairman sceptical about the amount of progress that could be made this way:

*"...we felt that we that we'd kind of done what we started referring to as 'the coffee morning approach'...which is to get people sat around and do the community engagement stuff and try and talk to them about doing this, that and the other...there's a limit to how much of that you can do...what we ought to be doing is... not bypassing the community exactly, but saying, well, there's got to be a bigger way of doing this"*

Interview: John, AET chairman Arlen

In Thornton, the PM, Hugh, was also cautious about the role that community engagement could or should play in shaping the group's direction:

*He [Hugh] said that they thought quite strategically at the start about whether to make it an inclusive community group from the beginning, but they decided it was better to set the agenda by themselves (i.e. The Board) so that they didn't get caught up in endless consultation meetings which diluted their initial vision.*

Research Diary, Thornton

The apparent lack of involvement of 'the community' in the two CCF groups' strategy doesn't detract from the fact that the groups themselves were committed to the development and improvement of the local area and the lives of the people living there. The lack of significant input from the wider geographic community is arguably a symptom of the fact that "...there is rarely if ever any unitary community interest" (McCarthy, 2005: 1008). The following and final section of this chapter explores the implications that this has on the ability of the CCF to foster more sustainable lifestyles at the community level.

## 5.7 Implications for community sustainability

The observed heterogeneity of community, in itself, does not preclude the ability of CCF groups to facilitate the use of community as the *means* to achieve sustainability goals. Both TT and AET deliver projects which are tailored to the geographic community in question and encourage low carbon behaviours. Whilst uptake of the low carbon behaviours being encouraged was much lower than group ‘membership’, that is not to say that the fact that the intervention had been designed and driven by local residents had not succeeded in higher participation than if they had been delivered by an external provider. Assessing whether this was the case was beyond the capacity of this research, but there is no reason to suggest that the observed benefits of localising environmental messages had not paid off in these two cases.

However, the very low numbers of members of the geographical community that were involved in the fundamental direction and purpose of the group was striking, and raises significant questions about the extent to which the (geographically-defined) community as a whole is being empowered or strengthened by the projects, and consequently whether ‘community’ is being delivered as an *end* as well as a *means* of this policy.

As discussed in section 5.1, social capital is often highlighted as critical for social sustainability. Specifically, Magis (2010) identified three different types of social capital which are required for community resilience: ‘bonding’, ‘bridging’, and ‘linking’ social capitals. Bonding capital is created in close relations between individuals *within groups* that generate cohesion. Bridging capital is created in loose relationships *between groups*, where individuals who would not usually interact are connected, increasing diversity, and expanding the resources available. Finally, linking capital is created in a group’s *vertical relationships* with actors with authority or power. These relationships increase the group’s ability to take advantage of opportunities and get their voices heard.

Both AET and TT were observed to display high levels of both bonding and linking capital. Through their participation in the CCF, they had been directly linked to actors with authority and power, and by working together on various projects funded through the CCF, the internal cohesiveness of AET and TT had also been strengthened. However, there was limited evidence of bridging capital between the CCF groups and the other local actors. These observations provide evidence to support the concerns

expressed by Bridger and Luloff (2001) regarding the common assumption that building social capital will automatically support more sustainable communities. They argue that the ‘stocks’ of social capital created within a certain network of individuals cannot be aggregated to the community level. Instead, communities are made up of a number of networks with individuals working across multiple groups, and “pockets of social capital, each isolated from one another, tend to exist” (Bridger and Luloff, 2001: 469).

These pockets of social capital, instead of strengthening geographic communities, have the potential to be divisive. As Robert Putnam (2000) argues, “Networks and the associated norms of reciprocity are generally good for those inside the network, but the external effects of social capital are by no means always positive” (2000: 21). That is, social capital which benefits or enhances one group within the community may be detrimental or problematic for another. Putnam suggests that some community groups may even “exploit” social capital as it may be “rhetorically useful for such groups to obscure the difference between the pro-social and antisocial consequences of community organisations” (2000: 22).

## 5.8 Summary

‘Community’ has two inter-connected roles within sustainability policy. First, community can be employed as the ‘*means*’ by which sustainability ambitions, such as carbon emissions reductions, are achieved. Second, strengthening the bonds of ‘community’ may also be an ‘*end*’ of sustainability policy in itself. Policy initiatives such as the CCF often view these two roles as linked in a mutually reinforcing relationship: employing ‘the community’ as the means by which to achieve climate change mitigation projects is thought to build social capital and empower those communities, thereby, produce ‘community’ as an end. Implicit within this rationale is the assumption that ‘the community’ is a tangible entity which is capable of delivering projects to reduce carbon emissions.

The CCF explicitly requires that communities are defined in terms of geography, a requirement which reflects traditional understandings of community as based on organic, place-based connections between individuals living in close proximity. Whilst the residents of Thornton and Arlen were observed to demonstrate some indicators of place attachment typical of the *Gemeinschaft*, the bonds identified in my findings were

more closely aligned with those of personal 'place identity', as opposed to place-based community bonds.

This is not to suggest, as some have, that community does not exist in modern society, but rather that traditional, place-based notions of 'community', which imagine the rural village as a homogeneous, cohesive entity, is out-dated and romantic. Instead, both Arlen and Thornton were observed to encompass multiple, overlapping 'communities-within-communities' which served to segment the geographically-defined 'community' of the CCF. This observation was supported by the finding that only a small proportion of the geographically-defined community participated in either of AET and TT.

Due to the patchwork nature of social bonds within Arlen and Thornton, AET and TT cannot represent 'the community' as a whole, but should be viewed themselves as a small sub-community within that community. Therefore, the 'community' that is being strengthened and empowered is the self-selected sub-community of AET or TT themselves.

Through the receipt of CCF funding, AET and TT are creating small pockets of 'bonding' and 'linking' social capital within Arlen and Thornton. Consequently, not only are these initiatives not increasing wider community cohesion, but without building the necessary 'bridging' capital, these pockets of social capital can act to undermine the social cohesion of the geographic community. Therefore, whilst AET and TT can legitimately claim to be employing 'the community' as the '*means*' by which to achieve sustainability, they are not empowering or strengthening that same geographically-defined community as an '*end*'.

The following chapter builds on these observations by considering the implications for community-led action of one of the most striking and controversial lines of separation found to exist within both Arlen and Thornton: the incomer-local divide.

## 6 The influence of the ‘White Settler’

*“To stand with the incomer and share that perspective is to adopt, however fleetingly, an objective perspective. What was taken for granted, like the air we breathe, becomes, with an accompanying sense of anxiety, a subject of reflection which is now seen as something vulnerable and fragile...”*

Charles Jedrej and Mark Nuttall (1996: 99)

The previous chapter discussed the role of community as the ‘means and ends’ of sustainability policy. My fieldwork findings demonstrate that only a small proportion of the geographic communities that the groups had been set up to represent were actively involved in the group’s activities or invested in their future. Consequently, I argued that, whilst ‘the community’ may still be seen to be the means by which sustainability goals are being reached, regardless of how many members of that community participate, there is doubt as to whether the same geographically-defined community is being strengthened and empowered and, therefore, whether ‘community’ can legitimately be identified as an ‘end’ of these projects.

I attributed the CCF projects’ lack of success in empowering the community as a whole to the observed misalignment between the simplified conception of ‘the community’ within the CCF and the inconsistent, multi-layered, heterogeneous reality of community in my two case study locations. I argued that, if any form of community is being empowered, it is in fact a sub-community of ‘the community’ within which the CCF group is working, and which it ostensibly represents.

The following chapter explores the implications that sub-communities, or “communities within communities”, can have for “community-led” action by highlighting one of the most striking examples of this that was observed in both the two case studies: the incomer-local divide, a distinction that has frequently been identified as a sub-division within rural Scottish communities (Forsythe, 1980; Jedrej and Nuttall, 1996; Burnett, 1998; Short and Stockdale, 1999).

This chapter begins with a brief overview of how the ‘revival of the countryside’ in recent decades has been linked to significant changes to of rural society, and the implications this has had on the perception of ‘incomers’ to rural Scotland. I provide evidence from my two case studies to demonstrate the undeniable existence of ‘incomer’ and ‘local’ identities in both Arlen and Thornton. Whilst there was very little evidence of any generic tension between these two social groups, it was clear that incomers were frequently identified as being more vocal and active in community development activities. The perception that some incomers wanted to make changes to the community soon after moving in, was observed to generate some resentment. I discuss the implications of this for AET and TT, both led primarily by those considered ‘incomers’ in each community. I argue that the dominance of ‘incomers’ within community groups such as these risks the groups themselves being imbued with an ‘incomer’ identity. This, I suggest, can lead to those who categorise themselves as ‘local’ to actively resist the norms and behaviours promoted by the groups. Therefore, whilst broadly ignored in community development policy, the incomer-local sub-division can significantly complicate, and even undermine, ‘community-led’ climate change action.

## 6.1 Urban to rural migration: the arrival of the incomer

As discussed in Chapter Three (p.47), from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, Scotland, in line with other rapidly industrialising nations, experienced mass migration to newly-forming urban centres as people left rural areas in search of employment and a better standard of living (Devine, 1999). Throughout this time, there were a small number of individuals who swam against the current, migrating from city to country. These were usually either return migrants (that is, previous out-migrants returning to rural birthplaces) or traditional rural professionals, such as teachers, doctors, and ministers. However, in the latter half of the twentieth century, this ‘counterstream’ urban to rural migration dramatically increased, to the point that the rural-urban flow reversed in some places (Forsythe, 1980).

This changing tide can be linked to substantial changes in regional, national, and European rural policy which have encouraged the diversification of the rural economy away from agriculture, particularly towards tourism. This, coupled with improved communication networks and increased residential mobility, has made living in rural

areas more attractive and more feasible for a wider range of people (Short and Stockdale, 1999), most notably, to a third migrant type: the ‘urban refugee’ (Forsythe, 1980). These “disaffected city dwellers” (Forsythe, 1980: 287) are drawn to the countryside in search of the rural ‘good life’, namely, a lifestyle that is “peaceful, quiet, friendly, safe, and natural, in contrast to the noise, dirt, anonymity, danger, and pressure of urban life” (Forsythe, 1980: 290).

The arrival of urban in-migrants, stereotypically middle-class, former ‘white collar’ professionals (Stockdale, 2006), is associated with significant inflows of entrepreneurial skills and capital. For rural areas with dwindling populations, originally built on farming and fishing industries that are now in severe decline, this type of repopulation offers hope of social and economic sustainability (Short and Stockdale, 1999). However, urban to rural migration has also been associated with significant negative repercussions for both the migrants and the receiving communities.

Cloke *et al* (1997) note that, in several respects, people living in rural areas are thought of – and think of themselves – as “living their lives in different ways” from people in cities and towns (p.211). Unlike the traditional ‘professional’ and ‘return’ in-migrants, ‘urban refugees’ are often seeking a radical change of lifestyle, and have limited experience of rural living and no local family ties in the communities to which they move (Forsythe, 1980). Consequently, attempts to blend into the existing social fabric of rural communities can be challenging for both sides. While repopulation and rejuvenation of the local economy is considered by most to be a good thing, urban incomers can be perceived as a threat to the social organisation and culture of rural communities, and in-migration can elicit a fear that indigenous people, and their lifestyles, will be marginalised in the process (Jedrej and Nuttall, 1996). In response to this fear, Elias and Scotson (1994: 149) have suggested that some “established” local residents may actively seek to discredit the reputation of incomers as a means of demarking them as “outsiders”, so as to protect their own standing in the community and reduce the apparent threat to the existing social order. It has been argued that this is particularly the case in rural Scotland, “where incomers are sometimes explicitly vilified, as outsiders with imperialist aspirations to subjugate and destroy local lifestyles and culture” (Short and Stockdale, 1999: 177).

Anthony Cohen (1982; 1987) has emphasised that the boundaries which demarcate that community from others are essential elements in creating the sense of belonging attributed to membership of a community. A necessary part of the process of defining a community is defining those who belong to that community, an act which is unavoidably dependent upon determining those who do *not* belong (Day, 2006). Lovell (1998: 4) suggests that belonging is “at least partly predicated on locality or a memory of locality” and yet, “The concept of locality as a well-delineated and identifiable place is itself problematised in phenomenological, historical and political terms”. As such, the ‘local’ must be “conditioned into being” through the construction of the foreign ‘other’ or ‘outsider’.

It can therefore be argued that the distinction between ‘insiders’ who do belong, and ‘outsiders’ who do not, is a ubiquitous part of all communities and societies (Crow *et al*, 2001). However, this is not to suggest that the process of delineating insiders from outsiders is a simple one. Being tightly enmeshed with understandings of community, the concept of belonging is highly complex and largely intangible. As Crow *et al* (2001) have demonstrated, it is not the case that in-migrants are automatically considered ‘outsiders’ in the communities they join. The authors highlight that the concept of an insider-outsider distinction is fundamentally problematic due to the inherent plurality of ‘community’ discussed in the previous chapter. That is, an incomer who may be considered an ‘outsider’ to the geographic community, based on their lack of ancestral ties to that place, may, for example, be a very active member of a local social club, giving them ‘insider’ status within that community of interest.

Despite the repeated positioning, in academic and popular discourse, of an ‘incomer’ identity as ‘other’ to a ‘local’ identity (Burnett, 1998), the act of delineating the ‘incomer’ from the ‘local’ is complicated by the fact that they are mutable and subjective labels. In an ethnographic study of a Hebridean island community, Kohn (2002) observed that, rather than discrete ‘incomer’ and ‘local’ categories, it is more fitting to consider an ever-evolving incomer-local continuum, with length of residence in the community just one of the factors determining a person’s “incomerness” (p.144). Similarly, within the context of a discussion on belonging and Scottish identity, Kiely *et al* (2005) discuss at length how the legitimacy of “claiming, attributing or receiving identities” (p.153) must be seen as a complex interplay between various (sometimes conflicting) factors,



primarily “blood, birth, and belonging” (p.153). As such, the boundary between incomers and locals is decidedly fuzzy and contestable, with serious doubts as to whether such an over-simplification of social organisation is meaningful or accurate (Burnett, 1998).

However, as highlighted by Burnett (1998), whilst the superficiality of an ‘incomer’ or ‘local’ identity is widely accepted, “there is much evidence to suggest that within the rural setting individuals do recognize the economy of incomer/local labels” (p.217). This was certainly the case in both Arlen and Thornton. Having entered my first field site with no knowledge of any of the literature on the incomer-local divide, and with no previous experience of life in rural communities, the existence of ‘incomer’ and ‘local’ social markers was starkly apparent. Also apparent was the connotation of difference implicit in these markers. Therefore, despite the ‘fuzziness’ in defining the divide, it seems illogical to ignore the impact that these lines of difference are bound to have on the way the community function. As Cohen (1982: 3) states, “It seems to me incontrovertible that if people in one milieu perceive fundamental differences between themselves and the members of another, then their behaviour is bound to reflect that sense of difference”.

In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss my observations of ‘incomer’ and ‘local’ identities in Arlen and Thornton, and the specific implications this had for the AET and TT, community-led groups both largely dominated by ‘incomers’.

## 6.2 Incomers and locals in Arlen and Thornton

In both Arlen and Thornton, the labels of ‘incomer’ and ‘local’ were used frequently by members of the community as a means of describing both themselves and others. In line with the preceding discussion, there was a lack of clarity about how these categories were defined in both communities, but the fact that the distinction existed was undeniable and uncontested, particularly in Arlen.

In addition to the distinct physical boundaries of the islands in Arlen, the passing on of the local Gaelic language and culture, coupled with an ongoing historic ‘blood tie’ to the land through the inheritance of a family croft, provided readily apparent markers of a ‘local’ identity, which arguably lent a degree of palpability to the distinction between a ‘local’ and an ‘incomer’. However, as Masson (2007) has argued, seemingly obvious

cultural markers such as these are rarely sufficient for defining identities such as ‘incomer’ and ‘local’, as the following interview extract reveals:

*Emily: “[Introduction to the interview] ...So obviously one of the key groups of people here are crofters and, when I asked Callum, he said that you would be a great person to speak to, to get that kind of perspective.”*

*Mary: “Yes, well I’m an incomer, as it were.”*

*Emily: “Mmm. How long have you been here now?”*

*Mary: “Eight and a half years, nine in March.”*

Interview: Mary, crofter, Arlen

Mary, who owns, and single-handedly maintains, her own croft, was specifically suggested to me as a good person to speak to get a crofter’s perspective. It is revealing that, despite this, and despite having lived on the island for almost nine years, the very first words Mary spoke to me were to identify herself as an ‘incomer’. This arguably demonstrates both the importance and the endurance of this distinction to Mary, as well as, perhaps, a desire not to be seen to be misrepresenting herself as a ‘local’.

Throughout the interview, Mary expressed a pronounced awareness of the long history of the unique crofting culture on the islands, and her appreciation at being permitted, as an incomer, to be a part of it:

*“To me, it’s been a privilege, actually, to come here, and be accepted if that’s what I am, I don’t know. I mean, obviously I don’t speak – I don’t put people’s backs up, put it that way, well I hope I haven’t. I’ve tried to meet them halfway. And they’re all such great people, and that’s without trying to sound patronising, it isn’t at all. It’s just a different way of life.”*

Interview: Mary, crofter, Arlen

Here, Mary refers to the “different way of life” of people in Arlen, echoing the observations of Cloke *et al* (1997) raised in the previous section (p.117), and supporting the assertion that it is essential to acknowledge and accept the lines of differences between the ways in which different people live their lives. During my stay on Arlen, this was reflected in evidence of a pervasive difference in certain social and cultural norms between incomers and locals. One observed example of this is the tradition of sharing food and drink on the islands. During an informal lunchtime chat, Isla suggested that incomers do not always understand local traditions and that this can sometimes be a source of tension:

*Isla said that the people here are very generous but they haven't historically had a lot of money so the way they shared their wealth was through food and drink so it is very common if you stop by somebody's house for them to give you a cup of a tea, biscuits, scones, cheese, etc. She says that one of the problems some local people have with incomers is that they appear mean, but she thinks this may just be a cultural difference – incomers don't realise it's the norm to give people food and drink if they pop round to your house.*

Research Diary, Arlen

Interestingly, I observed a related scenario being played out in an experience I had at a Christmas party later in my stay on Arlen. The party was hosted by an English couple, John and Jilly, who had lived on the islands for about four years:

*[At the party] Callum [born in Arlen] and Matt turned up about two hours late. Callum was reminiscing with Gordon about the family who used to live in Jack and Jilly's house before they moved to the islands... After being there for about 20 minutes, Callum said we should go... I asked if he didn't think it was a bit soon for him to leave... Callum said that we obviously weren't that welcome because we weren't being offered any drinks... He pointed out my empty glass and said that he thought it was pretty rude as leaving a guest without a drink is a sign that they are not welcome. He put it down to the fact that they were English.*

Research Diary, Arlen

There were quite a lot of people at the party, and the atmosphere was informal. If I had noticed, I would have put the failure of having my drink refilled down to the innocent oversight of busy host, as opposed to a social snub. However, not being local myself, that in itself is perhaps a perfect reflection of the cultural difference between incomers and locals, which can result in unintended social transgressions and the subsequent distancing between certain members of the community. The fact that Callum associated this 'abnormal' behaviour (that is, behaviour at odds with a perceived social norm) with the hosts' identities as English incomers is indicative of the process of 'othering'. By identifying what he perceives to be ill-mannered behaviour as characteristically English, Callum pointedly distinguishes 'them' from 'us' (McCollum, 2013).

It was clear from everyday conversation that everybody in Arlen recognised a distinction between incomers and locals, however, by and large, this was not considered to have a negative effect on the community. If anything, there was probably more direct evidence of the reverse, as demonstrated by this quote from Norman, a resident who had moved to Arlen just a few months previously:

*"I've never had any cause to think that people are anything other than welcoming. I'm sure there are some people who don't like 'incomers' or whatever you want to call them, but I've never come across that."*

Interview: Norman, Lower Arla resident, Arlen

Nobody I spoke to suggested that they were against people moving in to the islands, and nobody who had moved to Arlen reported feeling unwelcome upon arrival. An interview with Henry, a resident of Arlen Mor who had moved to the islands from Wales to take on a local development job, supported the idea that the incomer-local divide is a harmless and natural ubiquity of rural society that is no different from other rural places:

*"I lived in Wales before I came here...it's not much different there. The locals who all went to school together all know each other and have their social circle and everyone else – they don't mix that much anyway. I don't think it's anything too unusual to be honest... But there are- [pause] I would say the locals and the incomers do mix, but not all of them."*

Interview: Henry, Arlen Mor resident, Arlen

Henry's suggestion that, whilst he does not perceive it as a particular problem, there are some incomers and locals or choose not to mix with each other socially were echoed in Thornton. In an interview, Janet, a fifty-year-old resident who was born in Thornton and had never lived anywhere else, raised the issue of incomers:

*Emily: "So people must know you really well around here?"*

*Janet: "Oh, everybody knows me! [laughing]"*

*Emily: "Do you like that?"*

*Janet: "Aye I think it's fine. I don't mind people knowing me."*

*Emily: "I find it strange, you know, coming from London, I just can't imagine living somewhere where—"*

*Janet: "[Finishing my sentence]—everybody knows you. I don't think everybody knows me as much as they used to. Thornton's got bigger."*

*Emily: "The population's got bigger?"*

*Janet: "Aye, people moving in here. Down that way, there's a big housing estate and most of the people are not local."*

*Emily: "Oh really? Is it holiday homes, or people who have come to stay?"*

*Janet: "No, it's people who have retired here from down south. The people next door to me come from Norwich."*

*Emily: "And do they get along in the community?"*

*Janet: "Some of them do, some of them don't – [interrupted briefly by Will, a TT employee, coming in to the café and asking what we were doing]"*

*Emily: "So, do you find that some people come here and keep themselves to themselves?"*

*Janet: "[Emphatically] Yes! I think some of them have got something to hide. That's what I reckon. I'm friends with one of the girls that lives down there and she says, "oh, I can't remember if it's them on their second marriage or them on their third marriage", you know, things like that, they don't want people to know that."*

Interview: Janet, Thornton

Janet's observations that some people who move in to the community actively shy away from engaging with other members of the community resonates with Henry's observations in Arlen, and it is clear that Janet does not perceive the people she is speaking about who have moved to Thornton to retire to be 'local'. Whilst I have no way of confirming whether or not her assertions are true, in her comment that the incomers who live on the housing estate may have "something to hide", Janet can be seen to be supporting the observations of Elias and Scotson (1965: 96) who suggest that "villagers" ('locals') are likely to share negative gossip about "the Estate" ('incomers') as a means of demarcating the lines of difference between the two groups. As the conversation continued, it became clearer that Janet perceives there to be significant cultural differences between 'local' people and 'incomers', specifically the English:

*Emily: "Oh I see. So do you think it's changed quite a lot then, Thornton?"*

*Janet: "It has, aye."*

*Emily: "In what ways?"*

*Janet: "In every way. People, you know, they don't speak. I was always brought up to speak to everybody I met on the street but that doesn't happen now. English people don't do that. My son went to Epping with his granny and he couldn't understand why people didn't speak to him in the street [laughing]. He was quite small - [interrupted by Will coming in again and starting a conversation about a local birthday party]."*

Interview: Janet, Thornton

Janet's views that English people are less friendly to other people they meet on the street chime with Callum's identification of the English as being unwelcoming to guests, and may support the suggestion by some authors that the 'othering' of incomers as not 'local' is a particularly pertinent issue in rural Scotland, where a surge in English immigration "has to some extent come to symbolize the negative popular perspective

placed on social and cultural change associated with migration” (Short and Stockdale, 1999: 178). A clear example of this emerged in an interview in Arlen. Laura, who was born in Glasgow but had spent many summers working on the islands and had subsequently moved permanently to Arlendale when she married a local man, relayed an example of a rare experience of negativity she had faced from one person on the islands:

*“...one local person down in Arlen Mor once said to me, ‘Ah, Sassenachs [pejorative Gaelic slang for the English] are coming up and taking all the jobs’, you know, ‘Mainlander coming and taking our jobs’ ... It is quite difficult because, I mean, that person really upset me when they said ‘Sassenach coming in and taking all the jobs’ because I was like, ‘How dare you? Because your kids are going to Glasgow and taking my flipping jobs, if you’re going to say that’ [laughs], you know? And it’s really annoying, but I think it is a minority of people that think that.”*

Interview: Laura, Arlendale resident, Arlen

This experience is a classic example of the stereotypical conception of the “problem of incomers” described by Jedrej and Nuttall (1996: 3), which attributes the disruption of traditional life and culture, including the unavailability of jobs and housing, to incomers, as well as the conflation of ‘incomers’ and ‘Sassenachs’.

The English have long represented the largest minority group in Scotland (Watson, 2003; McIntosh *et al*, 2004; Bond, 2006). The number of English people living in Scotland rose sharply throughout the second half of the twentieth century; between 1951 and 2001, the number of English-born residents in Scotland increased by 84%, dramatically outpacing the rise in any other migrant group (Watson, 2003: 27). Currently, over half of the people living in Scotland that were born outside Scotland were born in England (National Records of Scotland, 2014). In the 1960s, the pejorative term ‘white settlers’ emerged to refer to the rising number of urban migrants, most commonly from England, moving to remote rural Scottish communities. Although understood to mean slightly different things to different people, the term is frequently associated with a sense of colonisation, and a concern that local cultures are under threat of domination from the incoming (English) culture (Watson, 2003). As Burnett (1998) notes, within the rhetoric of belonging in rural Scotland, “the constructions of difference between Scotland and England are potently invoked” (p.206).

There was a marked rise in vocal opposition to the ‘Englishing of Scotland’ during the 1990s, embodied by the emergence of two high-profile campaigning groups, ‘Settler Watch’ and ‘Scottish Watch’, both of whom lobbied against English migration to Scotland (Dickson, 1994; Jedrej and Nuttal, 1996). The failure of both of these campaigns to garner significant public support adds to the weight of evidence which disputes the idea of a serious anti-English sentiment across Scotland (e.g. McIntosh *et al*, 2004; Watson, 2003). However, this is not to suggest that the distinction between English and Scottish identities is unimportant. Whilst Dickson (1994) presents evidence against the idea of a colonial-style ‘Englishing’ of Scotland as a whole, he does concede that “it may well be the case that localised problems do occur in areas where economic and social infrastructures are more fragile and vulnerable” (p.130).

The economic and social infrastructure of remote rural Scotland is arguably particularly fragile, perhaps making places such as Arlen and Thornton more sensitive to the threat of cultural change from incoming populations. Whilst Arlen (a Hebridean island) and Thornton (a lowland settlement) have very different cultural histories, in both places, the vast majority of residents born outside of Scotland were born in England. As Table 5.1 shows, almost a quarter (24%) of Thornton’s residents were born in England compared with the national figure of 9%. Of the 29% of the Thornton population born outside of Scotland, 83% (24 out of 29 per cent) were born in England, while for Scotland as a whole, this figure is 53% (9 out of 17 per cent). Although, at 12%, Arlen has a much lower overall proportion of English-born residents than Thornton, it is a higher proportion than the Scotland-wide figure of 9%. Furthermore, at 75%, a much higher proportion of the Arlen residents born outside Scotland were born in England than across Scotland as a whole. These figures are arguably even more revealing when compared to those for Edinburgh and Glasgow, where the non-Scottish born residents are much less dominated by the English.

Country of birth	Scotland	Arlen	Thornton	Edinburgh	Glasgow
Scotland	83%	84%	71%	70%	80%
England	9%	12%	24%	12%	5%
Other	8%	4%	5%	18%	15%

**Table 6.1: Country of birth by percentage of population**  
**Source: Adapted from National Records of Scotland (2014)**

It is important to note that it is of course not the case that all incomers to rural Scottish communities were born outside Scotland. Incomers also migrate from Scottish towns and cities, as well as from other rural Scottish areas. These individuals are equally likely to be identified as ‘incomers’ as the English. As discussed earlier, the labelling of an individual as an ‘incomer’ does not signify an explicit identity, but encompasses degrees of ‘incomerness’. It became apparent during both periods of fieldwork that there were many elements of an individual’s personality, beyond their place of birth, which influenced whether or not they would be considered a ‘white settler’, as the following extract demonstrates:

*Craig said that a lot of the allotment holders were white settlers. I laughed [out of shock] and said I couldn’t believe he called them white settlers here [I thought it was a Highland term]. He said of course; that’s what they are... I asked if he thought of me as a white settler because I was English. He said no, that white settlers are people who move into a place and try and change things.*

Research Diary, Thornton

For Craig, what makes an ‘incomer’ a ‘white settler’, and by connotation objectionable, is the ambition to disrupt the status quo. This is a key point with regard to initiatives such as TT and AET which have been explicitly set up to encourage and facilitate local change, and is particularly pertinent considering that the founding and running of both AET and TT was very heavily influenced by individuals who were considered, by themselves and others, to be ‘incomers’.

I found it striking, and somewhat incongruous, that both AET and TT, “community-led” initiatives, were dominated by individuals who were not recognised as ‘locals’. Therefore, having identified that ‘incomer’ and ‘local’ identities were well-established in both Arlen and Thornton, the following section goes on to explore the implications that connotations of the ‘white settler’ may have for the efficacy of ‘incomer-led’ community groups in gaining widespread local support.

### 6.3 ‘White settlers’ and community-led action

Only one of the seven members of AET’s Board of Directors was born in Arlen, and neither of the two PMs was originally from the islands. The vast majority of Board members and employees were originally from England. My arrival at AET prompted



some members of the team to reflect on the fact that the organisation was predominantly non-Scottish:

*Isla said over lunch [with Callum and Gus] that she had realised yesterday that only three of the people in AET were Scottish [and only two were born on the islands] ...*

Research Diary, Arlen

Similarly, in Thornton, almost everyone involved in the founding and subsequent management of TT had moved into Thornton rather than being born there, and consequently were considered ‘incomers’:

*Hugh [TT PM] is originally from the Midlands [in England] but his parents moved to Surrey when he was 16. He said he hated it so much he applied for universities that were as far away as possible [i.e. Scotland] ... I asked if his wife [the TT Chairman] was from Thornton. He said no, they had moved here together about 8 years ago. He said that they were “definitely incomers” and maybe that was part of it [the reason some people are opposed to TT].*

Research Diary, Thornton

It was clear that the majority of the staff and Board of TT were thought of as ‘incomers’, but I was surprised to hear Craig use the term ‘white settlers’ (see p.126) as, at the time, I understood the term to be a fairly offensive one, primarily used to refer to the threat of English incomers to the traditional clan culture of the Highlands. I heard the term used only a couple of times in Arlen, and was equally surprised when, on one occasion, Callum used the expression to describe the AET Board:

*Callum referred to the AET Board as ‘white settlers’, which shocked me a bit. He said that they were trying to bring things from where they’re from to Arlen but not speaking to local people.*

Research Diary, Arlen

It is clear from the words of both Craig and Callum that a key part of their objection to some of those involved in the two groups is that they appear to have moved into the community with an ambition to try to change things. Both were born locally and, in both cases, were the most vocal about incomers of anyone I got to know. It is perhaps surprising, given their apparent resistance to the ambitions of the groups, that both Craig and Callum were employees of TT and AET respectively. Callum and Craig both saw their respective CCF group’s identity as ‘incomers’ as a limitation to their success

and believed that their own personal involvement in the project – as ‘locals’ – had been instrumental in gaining acceptance for the groups. Callum suggested that before he and Emma (the only other Arlen-born employee) had joined AET “*nobody had even heard of them*” (Research Diary, Arlen), and Craig made it clear that he had been vital to gaining the support and cooperation of other local people and businesses, as the following extract explains:

*Craig said that when he approached Jess [local greengrocer] about selling vegetables she asked first if he was growing any himself that she could buy. He says that the only reason Jess takes TT produce is because she knows Craig and he’s local. He said she didn’t want anything to do with them at first because they’re ‘white settlers’...*

Research Diary, Thornton

Although the specific term ‘white settlers’ was rarely used, the view that there were some people who moved in and tried to change things was echoed a number of times throughout my fieldwork. For example, in an interview in Arlen, I asked Peter about the future of life on the islands and he identified migration as a key determining factor:

*Peter: “I’ve always said that a lot of people coming into the islands, they maybe visit the place, and they like the place so much they come and live [here], but then the first thing they try and do, once they arrive here, is to try and change it all [laughs]. Because then they say “why isn’t the community doing this, and why isn’t it doing that?” And then they try and change things and force the community down different roads. That’s very prevalent.”*

*Emily: “And is there a sense among local, native people, that they’re very against the idea of people coming in and trying to –”*

*Peter: “They’re not against people coming here, but they are against people trying to tell them how to live their lives, or how they could change their lives for the better [laughs], for their own good [laughs again] – which is not necessarily the case.”*

Interview: Peter, Arlendale resident, Arlen

The suggestion that some incomers try to “force the community down different roads” or are “trying to tell them [local people] how to live their lives” starkly reflect the previously discussed narratives of a fear of colonisation by in-migrants (Jedrej and Nuttall, 1996). The importance of incomers making an effort to blend in, rather than try to change things, was frequently commented upon, particularly in Arlen, for example, in my interview with Laura:

Emily: *“And so do you think that people see you as an incomer to the islands?”*

Laura: *“Um, some do and some don’t. People I don’t know very well, some do see me as an incomer but, I think once you’ve been here- I think it depends on the attitudes. A person could be here for donkeys’ [years] and not seen as a local, and they’ve been here for 30 years, most of their life or something. But I think what makes a difference is if you kind of blend into the community or if you make an absolute effort to be different. So if you go along with the way it is here and you don’t fight against the way of living here then you’re fine.”*

Interview: Laura, Arlen

This extract demonstrates the fluid and subjective application of the label of incomer which is more or less likely to be attributed to in-migrants depending upon the way they behave. This supports the argument that, rather than being static, identity is socially constructed by the performance of “a complex set of behaviours, actions and labels which determine and are determined by our interactions with others” (Gill, 2005: 86). However, Laura’s suggestion, that incomers should try to “blend in” or “go along” rather than “fight against the way of living”, was problematized within the same interview, when she explained that it was generally accepted that much of the positive community development work, such as that being done by TIT and AET, is usually pioneered by incomers rather than locals:

Laura: *“...a lot of people do accept that most of the progress that’s made here is actually incomers coming in and doing things, because lots of the locals won’t actually go on community groups.”*

Emily: *“Why do you think that is?”*

Laura: *“I think they don’t want to be talked about. There’s a massive thing here about people don’t like to be talked about, or rumours or gossip going around about them. So if they stick their head up and go on a community group they immediately assume that they’re going to get shot down for it. Whereas incomers are like, ‘why would I care what anybody else says about me?’ [laughs]. If you’ve been born and brought up here it’s a really important thing.”*

Interview: Laura, Arlen

The suggestion that locals shy away from community development issues was echoed in a subsequent interview with Emma, who has lived in Arlen all her life. She suggested that some Arlen residents liked to be able to defer to incomers when it came to making decisions and pushing forward certain local issues:

*“I think most people [native to Arlen] are, especially the older generation, reluctant to draw attention to themselves and maybe making it known to people that they object to whatever it is... I think we like the fact that maybe people who move here notice things more that we’ve just grown to accept and we don’t notice as much, but, you know, it’s just a part of life really – things that we accept and then other people, maybe having just moved here, it’s more obvious – the things that are not acceptable, and things that need to change. So I think we quite like it secretly when someone else is willing to fight our battle for us...”*

Interview: Emma, Arlen

This raises an apparent contradiction between, on one hand, an objection to incomers coming in and telling locals what to do, and on the other hand, an expectation that incomers will be active in community development initiatives. These findings mirror those of previous similar studies, for example, Jedrej and Nuttal (1996) found that, in Highland communities, self-proclaimed ‘incomers’ felt forced to take the lead on community-led projects due to a lack of willingness from ‘local’ people, resulting in a dominance of ‘white settlers’ within local development groups and committees (p.178). The same was also reported by Forsythe (1980) in a study of Stormay, an Orkney community. She found that, since urban migrants had started arriving in Stormay, incomers were disproportionately represented within the leadership of local organisations. However, there were divided opinions on why this was the case:

*“Stormay folk [‘locals’] complain that the migrants have simply taken things over, pushing themselves forward while ignoring the talent of local people. Incomers, in contrast, claim that the Orcadians are so indecisive and fearful of criticism that they are glad to have outsiders take the lead”*

Forsythe (1980: 297)

This has also been identified outside rural Scotland, for example, in ‘Steeptown’ on the Isle of Wight, Crow *et al* (2001) found broad agreement among interviewees that “in-migrants were more likely than locally born residents of Steeptown to be active in community-based organizations” (p.40). However, the authors found there to be a lack of consensus about why this was the case, with some suggesting that incomers were intrinsically more motivated to “get things done”, while others correlated it with the ‘white settler’ logic that incomers move in and then want to change things (p.41). Similarly, in a study investigating women and the rural idyll in East Harptree, southwest

England, Little and Austin (1996) found evidence of incomer-local divide in terms of participation in – and enthusiasm for – certain activities:

*“While East Harptree was not characterised by fending social groupings... Some social activities were frequented more by one group than another - the village hall or theatre was seen as being run by the ‘newcomers’ while the Village Club very definitely ‘belonged’ to the ‘locals’... Some of the older village inhabitants commented that it was the incomers who were the most fervent supporters of the traditional village activities and festivals....”*

Little and Austin (1996: 108)

It was evident that the many clubs and committees in Arlen and Thornton were unrepresentatively populated by incomers, with a variety of possible explanations provided. In a discussion between some of the employees of AET, it was suggested that active involvement in ‘the community’ is something that incomers are seeking when they move to the islands:

*I asked what percentage of the Arlen population they [Callum, Emma, and Isla] thought were non-native and they agreed it would be quite small but that the incomers tended to be more vocal. I asked if they knew why and they said that incomers have usually moved to the islands for a certain way of life and so go out of their way to get involved in the community. Gus also half-joked that they are not very good at crofting or fishing so they had to find something else to do.*

Research Diary, Arlen

Similarly, in the following extract from an informal conversation between two TT employees and a Thornton-based youth worker – all of whom identified themselves as incomers – the presence of a divide within the community in terms of participation in community activities is linked to a division between incomers and locals:

*...Gary said that he has noticed that it’s always the same kind of people attending the youth things that go on, often the “lower classes” aren’t that involved. Lizzy asked if he thought it was an incomer/local thing. He said maybe yes.... Sarah said that the locals often perceive things to be run by posh incomers and don’t want their kids going along. Lizzy said that it is true that it is often incomers who are the ones who are doing these things...*

Research Diary, Thornton

Here, there is evidence that a perceived class difference between incomers and locals may be playing a role in the reluctance of locals to participate in activities organised by “posh incomers”. This suggestion correlates with previous observations that trends of

participation in local community-based activity “tend to show that individuals in higher socioeconomic strata are the active ones” (McLeod *et al*, 1999: 316).

#### 6.4 Sustainable living is only for “posh incomers”?

Drawing on his observations of community projects within the Transition Town Network (TTN), Aiken (2012) identified and discussed the striking similarity between the profile of members of TTN groups and that of Mohan’s (2011) ‘civic core’. The ‘civic core’ describes a segment of the population who are disproportionately engaged in voluntary activity and charitable giving. Typically affluent, middle-aged, and well-educated, these individuals are “well-resourced financially, educationally and with time” (Aiken, 2012: 96). As a result, these are the people who are most able to participate in ambitious community-led projects. The typical profile of an incomer, identified earlier in this chapter to be middle-class, ‘white-collar’ professionals, aligns closely with the characteristics of the ‘civic core’, and so, following this rationale, incomers are more likely to be engaged in community activity.

Further to this, Forsythe’s (1980) description of the ‘urban refugee’ as a middle-class individual in search of a “radical change in their own style of life” (p.287), but with a preconceived notion that his will be a “peaceful, quiet, friendly, safe, and natural” life (p.290), is arguably a prime candidate for involvement in a community-led sustainability initiative. The discourse of sustainability typically challenges the notion that lifestyles which revolve around ever-increasing consumption and economic growth will make people happy, and calls for new understandings of ‘the good life’ (6 and Christie, 1998). As Soper (2004: 115) has suggested, an awareness of “the more negative aspects for consumers themselves of their high-speed, work dominated, materialistic life-style, and... a sense that important pleasures are being lost or unrealised as a consequence of it”, can serve to spur individuals to seek lifestyles in which the pleasures of life can be enjoyed in a socially and environmentally conscious way, and has been linked to counter-urban migration (Benson and Osbaldiston, 2014).

Taking these factors together, the typical rural in-migrant is not only likely to be part of the ‘civic core’, but may well also be engaged in the sustainability movement. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that ‘incomers’ are heavily involved in community-led environmental sustainability organisations such as AET and TT.

However, as Aiken (2012) notes, whilst it is not necessarily surprising that a community-led sustainability project will attract those who have the will and resources to volunteer, the fact that such a narrow segment of the population is involved in such a project arguably jars with the rhetoric of “community-led” action. Building on the argument put forward in the previous chapter, the recognition that it is primarily a specific sub-set of the population, namely, well-educated, middle-class, and in my two case studies, incomers, who are involved in these projects arguably undermines the ability of the group to claim that ‘community’ is an end product of these projects.

Whilst the fact that involvement in pro-environmental activity is dominated by the well-educated, middle-classes has previously been recognised as problematic (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Middlemiss, 2011b; Cooper *et al*, 2012; Svensson, 2012; Barr and Devine-Wright, 2012; Aitken, 2012), the potential impact that this has on local engagement with projects seeking to encourage more sustainable lifestyles at the community level has been largely unexamined. Middlemiss (2011b), drawing on the work of Pawson and Tilley (1997), suggests that, “rather than agonising about who is not affected by policy, the object of research should be to gain a good understanding of who is able to be affected because he or she has volunteered to be actively involved” (p.277). However, a primary reason for taking a community-level approach to environmental sustainability is the expectation that messages can be tailored more specifically to that community, and, therefore, encourage more widespread local uptake of pro-environmental behaviours. If the only individuals participating in these initiatives are those comprising a select, and arguably already engaged, section of society (Barr and Devine-Wright, 2012) this raises questions about the legitimacy of such an approach.

My observations in Arlen and Thornton suggest that the local perception of community groups such as AET and TT as incomer-led may be restricting their ability to encourage more sustainable lifestyles throughout the community. As discussed in Chapter Two (pp.27-32), norms have been recognised as an important influence on pro-environmental behaviour (Stern *et al*, 1999; Bratt, 1999; Stern, 2000; Lindenberg and Steg, 2007; Schultz *et al*, 2007; Nolan *et al*, 2008). It has been suggested that social norms are an important part of encouraging co-operation within communities (Kandori, 1992) and, therefore, establishing pro-environmental norms at the community level is thought to be an effective means of encouraging more sustainable lifestyles throughout

that community. However, my findings have undermined the notion of ‘the community’ as a single, cohesive group (p.104). The evidence presented in this chapter has highlighted that one clear distinction within the two communities studied is between ‘incomer’ and ‘local’ identities, with ‘locals’ associating certain unfavourable behaviours or attitudes with an ‘incomer’ identity (p.126). These observations suggest that individuals may distinguish different sets of social norms for ‘incomers’ and ‘locals’. Therefore, if groups such as AET and TT take on an ‘incomer’ identity, this may restrict their ability to influence social norms throughout the wider community.

## 6.5 Summary

My observations in Arlen and Thornton support the findings in the literature (e.g. Forsythe, 1980; Jedrej and Nuttall, 1996; Burnett, 1998; Short and Stockdale, 1999) that ‘incomer’ and ‘local’ identities are pervasive in rural communities in Scotland. Whilst there was very little evidence in either case study of a general resistance towards people moving in to either Arlen or Thornton, the ‘incomer’ and ‘local’ labels were commonly used. There was evidence that the lines of division between the two identities were actively maintained through the process of ‘othering’, whereby those considered to be ‘local’ were observed to associate unfavourable social traits with individuals’ status as ‘incomers’. For example, the ‘incomer’ identity was frequently observed to be associated with a more vocal approach to community development issues and a desire for local change. Although, for some residents, this was seen to be a positive and progressive input, in a number of instances, the perception of individuals moving in to the community and then wanting to change it was resented. Consequently, it was suggested that, in order to be accepted locally, ‘incomers’ should try to blend in with the existing way of life.

This clearly has significant implications for AET and TT, both dominated by individuals considered to be ‘incomers’, and both explicitly pursuing local change. Both groups were referred to as ‘white settlers’ during my fieldwork stays, and there was evidence to suggest that the perception of the groups as ‘incomers’ negatively affected engagement with the community more widely. Therefore, despite the haziness of the lines of demarcation between ‘incomers’ and ‘locals’, these remain extremely important social



markers within some communities, and understanding these sorts of micro-politics is an essential part of fully engaging local communities.

The following chapter extends my exploration of the observation that only a small proportion of the local population were actively engaged in the work of AET or TT by looking outside the communities at the role that the CCF has in shaping the projects being delivered.

## 7 The double-edged sword of grant funding

*“The ‘output’ measures to which public funding is generally attached tend to make a mockery of community-based initiatives...the bureaucracies of accountability may, paradoxically, make activists and leaders less effective by taking them away from the community work...”*

Janet Rowe and Celia Robbins (2000: 161)

In the two preceding chapters, my analysis has focused on the role and nature of ‘community’ as it relates to the activities and ambitions of AET and TT. Chapter Five introduced the argument that the CCF groups engage members of the geographical community as the ‘means’ by which to achieve their goals, but that it is a sub-community which is being created and strengthened as the ‘ends’ of these activities, rather than ‘the community’ as whole. Chapter Six developed this theme by exploring and analysing the observation that both groups were led and driven primarily by ‘incomers’, and I argued that this incomer identity may be hampering the groups’ ability to engage residents of Arlen and Thornton more widely. In this chapter, I will discuss observations which suggest, somewhat counterintuitively, that the receipt of grant funding may, in some respects, exacerbate the challenge of engendering support and participation from the wider community.

Most community-led initiatives emerge informally in response to a local impetus for action, and begin operating as a small group of passionate and dedicated, unpaid volunteers, but, as organisations develop and become more confident and ambitious, many find that, to achieve their goals, they require more significant resources than those that are available locally. Consequently, many community-led initiatives seek some form of grant funding, and sourcing and securing sufficient funds is frequently identified as a primary barrier to the success of community-led initiatives (e.g. Hand, 2011; Church and Elster, 2002). However, there is currently a distinct lack of academic and political discussion about the ways in which the relationship between top-down, government-led

funding providers and bottom-up community-led organisations influences, not only the projects being delivered, but the way the initiatives operate within the community.

While the many self-evident benefits of funding were regularly observed during my fieldwork (for example, the generation of local employment, infrastructure and services), there was also clear evidence of a number of ways in which funding complicated community-led activity. Both the CCF groups studied were faced with managing the dichotomy between maintaining a genuinely inclusive and community-focused approach whilst at the same time becoming a part of an increasingly competitive fight for funding with other local organisations. As well as encouraging a competitive attitude, participation in the CCF was observed to impose some restrictions on the groups. Most noticeably, the requirement for a short-term output of units of carbon saved was not aligned with the long-term ambition of the groups to engender lasting behaviour change within their community. Furthermore, the administration and reporting demands associated with gaining and maintaining funding seemed to result in much of the groups' time being spent in the office completing paperwork and preparing for meetings, reducing the resources available for visible activity within the community.

These observations raised the question of whether this was unique to the particular design and management of the CCF, or whether these are ubiquitous problems with grant funding for community-led projects hoping to encourage more sustainable ways of living. This led to a short period of additional data collection, consisting of six semi-structured qualitative interviews with Board members and managers of other community-led initiatives across rural Scotland who had experience of funding from a range of sources.

In this chapter I present evidence from my two case studies to demonstrate the largely unreported potential challenges that grant funding can present for community-led initiatives. Specifically, the negative impact of three elements of grant funding are identified and discussed: i) the timescales of funding, ii) the administration demands associated with funding, and iii) the competition for funding. Following this, I provide a brief overview of the broader landscape of funding for community-led sustainability initiatives in Scotland beyond the CCF, and present the findings from interviews with six rural community groups who have experience with a range of funding providers. Overall, there was very strong agreement across the projects that, whilst grant funding

provides the necessary resources to maintain the organisation, the nature of grant funding also brings significant complications and restrictions to projects seeking to encourage and enable more sustainable lifestyles locally.

Based on these findings, I argue that there is a pressing need to critically examine the assumption that the provision of government funding for community-led sustainable development initiatives will always be of overall benefit (environmentally, socially and economically) at the local level. It cannot be assumed that the benefits associated with the provision of grant funding necessarily extend to the entire community, with a lack of evidence to suggest that the outcomes being reached through funding schemes such as the CCF are in fact facilitating a long-term move towards more sustainable lifestyles locally.

## 7.1 The influence the CCF in Arlen and Thornton

Grant funding is arguably particularly critical in Scotland's remote rural communities, where private investment is low (SCVO, 2011), and uncertainties about the economic future of agriculture and fishing, the lack of affordable housing, youth out-migration, and inadequate transport provision mean that remote rural locations include some of the most deprived communities in the country (Garrod *et al*, 2006). Remote rural locations have more charitable organisations per head than their urban counterparts, each likely to be focused on serving their immediate locality (Skerratt *et al*, 2012). The CCF therefore represents an opportunity for community-led initiatives to secure local investment. Despite this, there was evidence in both Arlen and Thornton to suggest a degree of local scepticism about the value of the CCF projects, and even some signs of resentment over the allocation of public money to the CCF groups, as the following two extracts demonstrate

*Sophie [TT member] started to talk to me about TT and asked if there were many groups out there who were doing things like them. I said that yes, there were quite a few doing something about reducing carbon emissions and that the government had a special pot of money available for exactly that. She started to tell me about the negative impression of TT that many people in the community have. She said that a lot of people think that they are taking money which could otherwise go to a children's hospital or something, they don't realise that the money is ring-fenced."*

Research Diary, Thornton

*Isla has received an email from a resident in Arlen Mor – it's a letter to the local paper which will be published in next month's edition. It is a critique of the work of AET on the growing trials, and the editor of the paper suggested that he sent it to AET first to have a look at (in case of any inaccuracies) before it went to print. The letter discusses how he and his wife currently grow extensively in their garden with minimal resources, whereas AET have invested a huge amount of public money (and produced carbon emissions) in constructing greenhouses, a wind turbine, paying salaries, etc, and there is very little tangible output. He states that the same, or more, could have been achieved by just speaking to local growers.*

Research Diary, Arlen

From both these extracts it is evident that some local people question whether the groups are good value for money. As will be discussed later in the chapter, access to grant funding is usually very competitive and so groups such as TT and AET will usually publicise their funding successes locally as an achievement for the community. However, as has been highlighted in the two preceding chapters, members of the community do not necessarily identify themselves as participants in – or beneficiaries of – the group. Therefore, raising local awareness of how much money the groups have received can have negative ramifications, as individuals see select members of the community benefitting from funding intended for the whole community.

In the remainder of this section, I present evidence from Arlen and Thornton to demonstrate how elements of the CCF can have a negative effect on local perceptions of the groups' value, and therefore can hinder the groups' ambitions to gain widespread trust and legitimacy locally. The following three aspects of grant funding will be discussed in detail: (i) the timescales of funding, (ii) the administration demands associated with funding, and (iii) the competition for funding.

### ***7.1.1 The timescales of funding***

The CCF currently awards up to £150,000 per year per project in funding rounds which open for applications several times a year. Community groups can apply for up to three years of funding in one application process. Whether operating on a one- or three-year basis, the primary outcome of all projects must be to achieve a reduction in carbon dioxide equivalent emissions (CO<sub>2</sub>e) within the lifetime of the funding, as Keep Scotland Beautiful (KSB), the administrators of the CCF, explain in their project criteria:

*“Your project must lead to a reduction in carbon dioxide equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e) in your community. Your project must measure and report on CO<sub>2</sub>e reduction using our recommended methodology, and improve carbon literacy (understanding the sources and impacts of CO<sub>2</sub>e) in your community.”*

KSB (no date(1): para.7)

KSB recognise that projects are likely to also deliver other social, economic and environmental outcomes for their community and ask that applicants estimate baseline values for each of these to enable progress towards up to five additional outcomes to also be measured. If applications are successful, evidence of progress made towards these expected outcomes should be regularly recorded and reported back to KSB every month.

In addition to achieving CO<sub>2</sub>e reductions and being ‘community-led’, projects funded by the CCF must fulfil a third criterion: a “sustainable legacy through physical change (e.g. building a new energy-efficient community hall), behavioural change (e.g. locals making lower-carbon transport choices), awareness change (e.g. the community understanding climate change) or social change (e.g. increased community cohesion around the project)” (KSB, no date(1): para.9). Fieldwork observations suggest that, for the participants of the groups in both communities, this third element, the long-term influence of the project, is considered the true mark of its success.

TT has been working in the community for three years. In that time it has established a number of physical facilities, including a community garden with allotments, and provides a number of other ongoing services to the local community, such as recycling collections. However, talking casually to one allotment holder whilst I was helping out in the garden, she said, “Obviously TT is only very new. Time will tell how effective it really is” (Research Diary, Thornton). It is clear that, for some, this is only the very beginning of a long and uncertain journey. This sentiment was echoed in a conversation with TT’s PM towards the end of the study period:

*I asked what Hugh [PM] thought the impact of TT was on the community... [and] what would be the permanent imprint of its existence. He thought for a while and then said that he thought there probably wouldn’t be one yet – they need to carry on a bit longer and try to weave themselves into the fabric of the community*

Research Diary, Thornton

Similar views had also been expressed in conversations with members of the AET. In a recorded interview, Daisy, an AET allotment-holder explicitly highlighted the importance of a lasting legacy from the project:

*“I just hope that they [AET] are going to be there in 10 years time... that there will be a legacy beyond the period of CCF funding, because I’ve seen development groups come and go and there’s always going to be something new happening... I just hope that the buildings that are there are going to be cared for and they’re not going to end up ruinous and broken and having to be cleared, bulldozed to the ground. I would hate to see that”*

Interview: Daisy, Arlen

These concerns reveal an underlying assumption that community development groups, such as those funded by the CCF, tend to be temporary and transient. Daisy notes a high turnover of groups in the community and worries that AET will be part of that process. This was an observation that also emerged in an interview with Peter, an employee of the Local Authority for the area in which AET operate:

*“I’ve seen it time and time again. You get waves of them coming in and they last 5 or 6 years and then they peter out and another lot take over”*

Interview: Peter Arlen

It is evident that the perception among some community members that grassroots initiatives are usually only passing fads is completely at odds with both the groups’ and the CCF’s desire for “a sustainable legacy”. However, observations suggested that the conditions of CCF funding are *perpetuating* this appearance of transience, and may even encourage a short-sighted approach from the funded groups.

For example, during my stay, AET were approaching the end of their current year of funding and were in the process of applying for further CCF support for their activities over the following three years. This process captured the inherent paradoxes and contradictions within the CCF, and I saw first-hand how the requirement for short-term outputs inevitably alters the ambitions of the projects that the community groups will take on:

*AET got feedback from KSB on the first draft of their CCF application... Many of the projects they were planning to apply for are thought to be inappropriate and unlikely to be funded. The KSB officer commented that [one of the proposed projects] is “too long term” to be funded... AET have a portion of their strategy focussed on research and development projects which will not necessarily result in significant carbon savings within the lifetime of the*

*funding (3 years), but will set up the infrastructure and knowledge for much bigger, long-lasting savings in the future. Therefore, they would like to set a 20 year timeframe for this particular project. KSB states that this is not the kind of work that is eligible for CCF funding as they are specifically seeking immediate carbon savings.*

Research Diary, Arlen

After two years of working on projects to encourage sustainable living within their community, AET believed that they had built up a strong foundation of context-specific knowledge about what works and what doesn't. They had come to the conclusion, echoed by the findings of the recent Government-commissioned review of the CCF (Brook Lyndhurst and Ecometrica, 2011), that there was a limit to the amount of individual behaviour and attitude change that they could achieve in the short term. Therefore, they decided to design a project with a twenty year lifespan and with ambitions to work with the Local Authority to enable a more institutional level approach. However, they were advised to refocus their strategy on short-term individual behaviour change if they wanted to have a chance of receiving CCF funding. As a result of this advice, AET removed the projects that they saw as their legacy projects from their strategy, focusing on a couple of ideas to promote sustainability in schools instead:

*Isla [AET PM] submitted final copy of the CCF application this morning. I talked to her over lunch about how confident she was that they would be successful. She said she really didn't know and that it could go either way. She said she hopes they [KSB] appreciate how stripped back the application is ... She said that the most important thing is that they get some funding for now so that the office doesn't have to shut down completely as they need to keep a presence in the community.*

Research Diary, Arlen

This situation exemplifies how fragile and uncertain the future of community-led projects can be when their existence relies entirely upon grant funding. The CCF states an ambition to enable lasting change within communities but its insistent demand for immediate carbon savings is not often consistent with this ambition. If a group is applying for funding for one financial year, the project has to have been completed and achieved measurable carbon savings within that year. Therefore, upon receipt of the funding, the group will appear to suddenly burst onto the scene and be very visibly active within the local community. For example, within their first year of funding, both



the CCF groups studied had constructed a major piece of infrastructure, employed a number of people from the community, launched a website, and published regular press releases in the local newspaper. But this activity was entirely dependent upon the grant funding to cover the associated salaries and overheads. Neither group appeared to have active volunteers who would be either able or willing to continue managing the current activities of the group on an unpaid basis once the funding ended. It is inevitable, then, that in the case that funding was not renewed the following year, the group would no longer be able to maintain the services or presence within the community as it could previously, giving, perhaps, the appearance of ‘petering out’. The danger here is that, if this cycle is repeated over time, the credibility of community projects and the messages they are promoting will be increasingly diluted by a belief that the group will not last, leading to cynicism and a lack of buy-in from the rest of the community.

### *7.1.2 Administration demands*

Both the groups studied had successfully applied to the CCF soon after their formation (AET in 2010 and TT in 2009) to provide the resources required to realise their respective projects. At the time of my visit, both groups had also been successful in subsequent applications: AET had received one further round of funding in 2011, and TT had received two further rounds. The groups also supplemented their income with smaller grants from other sources. Neither currently had their own means of generating any significant income. For awards to date, the CCF specifically prohibited projects from raising any revenue. This was revised after my fieldwork and, from Round 13 (announced March 2013) onwards, applications were permitted to include income generating activities.

Both groups spent a considerable portion of their time during my observation period applying for funding. AET was in the process of applying for their third round of funding from the CCF. TT had just had their third CCF application accepted and were applying for additional support from a number of other funds.

In both cases, PMs were very conscious of the time and effort they were spending on funding applications and raised it in conversation on a number of occasions. However, the attitudes of the two groups in relation to this were somewhat different. AET often flagged up the time-consuming nature of the CCF process to me, highlighting the effort that they were expending on their application. Preparing this application was the

priority of both AET PMs from my arrival at the end of October until the submission on 1st December. As well as devising the strategy, preparing the budget, calculating the estimated CO<sub>2</sub>e savings, and writing up the application documents, AET also spent time seeking letters of support from influential members of the community, such as councillors and teachers, which would boost their application.

From observing the application process, it is easy to imagine that many voluntary grassroots groups could be discouraged from attempting to apply due to the resources and skills required. Both groups studied were run by professional, university-educated individuals with extensive project management experience and high level accounting and budgeting skills. As discussed in the previous chapter (p.132), these are the type of people who tend to comprise the ‘civic core’ (Mohan, 2011) – in Aiken’s (2012) words “well-resourced financially, educationally and with time” – and are both willing and able to commit the time and resources to the application process. It seems logical to suggest that those who do not have these resources would therefore be at a disadvantage and less likely to apply. However, it is challenging to find evidence to support this claim as those who have not applied for grants are clearly much more difficult to identify than those who have applied.

The TT PM, in contrast to AET, was surprisingly self-conscious and almost apologetic about the resources being invested in seeking out funding:

*Hugh [TT PM] came into the office this afternoon in order to fill in a funding application. He said he heard about a new pot of money that was available for applications until tomorrow so he rushed to submit something. He said, half-jokingly, that maybe Harry [a local resident vociferously opposed to the group] is right that they are money-grabbing and will apply for any funds going.*

Research Diary, Thornton

The leaders of TT were particularly well-attuned to local and national politics and current affairs and had an effective network through which they gathered and dispersed information. This gave them a significant advantage in terms of knowing where and when they would be most likely to be successful in a funding bid. Grassroots community groups may not always have the same national networks to draw on or have the technical skills or resources required to keep abreast of the changing political landscape and its influence on third sector funding. Therefore, the community-led

initiatives that end up being successful in gaining funding may, as opposed to necessarily being the most deserving, simply be those who are the most competent in navigating the process of seeking and applying for the funding. In this way, the stipulations of the CCF may be perpetuating the tendency for community-led environmental initiatives to be dominated by “middle-class people with ‘time on their hands’” (Merritt and Stubbs, 2012: 99), and therefore, in line with the arguments put forward in the previous chapter, be exacerbating lines of difference between various sub-communities.

In addition to the time spent on the annual application process, once in receipt of a CCF grant the community group must report on their progress towards their expected outcomes at regular intervals throughout the year. This is usually every month, but is negotiable in certain circumstances. If the group is receiving any additional funding from other sources, this too is likely to have its own reporting and administration demands. If a community group has decided to take on paid employees this, again, brings further administration. Therefore, it was observed that one of the consequences of gaining grant funding is the necessary allocation of a significant portion of the group’s time to being in the office preparing reports and completing paperwork. This will inevitably impact on the time the group has to carry-out face-to-face community engagement and awareness-raising events and activities. A local businesswoman and member of TT (who held an allotment space and took up the recycling service) believed that many of the wider community weren’t fully aware of the group’s activities because “the garden is the only visual thing for the community” (Research Diary, Thornton), a comment which suggests that people expect to be able to see first-hand the work that the group are doing and what is being achieved.

It is an inevitable element of receiving grant funding that the community group in question will need, at times, to shift its priority from the community it serves to the monitoring of progress and completion of essential administration tasks. This may in turn affect the relationship between the group and the community, threatening its reputation locally. For example, in an interview with a member of AET discussing another funded community-led initiative in the local area (‘Are-land’) that has struggled to gain full public support, the interviewee suggested that one of Are-land’s problems was a lack of visible, direct interaction with community activity:

*“...some of the criticism of Are-land is that they’ve...not really...got their hands dirty at community level very much”*

Interview: Kirsty, Arlen

This comment raises some fundamental questions about the scope of projects that can legitimately be labelled ‘community-led’. If the group evolves in such a way that they are not seen to be getting “their hands dirty at community level”, not seeming to be actively working with the individuals in the community, it is perhaps somewhat incongruous to continue to define their activities as community-led. Observations suggest that the administration demands embedded within the conditions of grant funding may be contributing to a distancing between the group and the community.

### ***7.1.3 Competition and rivalries***

Remote rural economies in Scotland still rely heavily on traditional primary sector industries. In 2010, agriculture, forestry and fishing provided 17% of all jobs in these communities (Scottish Government, 2011a). However, primary industry has been in steady decline for many years, as illustrated by the national 14.2% fall in employment in agriculture and fishing between 1995 and 2008 (Bell, 2011: 72). It was evident from conversations with residents of both communities that this decline, and the subsequent increasing reliance on farming subsidies, is a major cause for concern locally:

*“I have everything I have always wanted, it is idyllic but also terrible, endless worry and struggle to make a living, constantly having to adapt to changing legislations and market forces, always being liable for unforeseen catastrophes...I can see the sheep farms and agricultural community in this area disappear under conifer trees and development... I don’t know what our future will be, it is not possible to make a living on a small farm now...”*

Interview: James, Thornton

Diminishing job opportunities and the associated out-migration of young educated people in search of work are considered to be significant drivers of ageing populations in remote rural communities (Skerratt *et al*, 2012). This, too, was a common topic of conversation in both communities, with evidence of an acute awareness of the need to help young people develop ideas and start up businesses locally:

*“We’re in a challenging economic situation... there’s that many strategic plans we could fill a shelf with them. And people in suits with grey hair come and say, ‘you really should do something in tourism because that’s what this place needs’. That doesn’t work. We’ve proven that doesn’t work. What you need to do, when a young person comes up with an idea, is allow that to flourish and support them.”*

Interview: Heather, Arlen

The declining private sector has made the public and third sector increasingly important sources of employment and services in remote rural communities. In the island community in particular, community-led initiatives have historically provided essential local facilities, such as nursery schools and carers for the elderly. However, in an interview, Liam, a development officer for a third sector organisation on the island, suggested that the number of funded community groups has now greatly exceeded requirements. This, he argued, has led to a glut of development officers all tasked with the same remit but working separately, leading to unnecessary duplication and confusion. Liam believed the reason for a lack of coordination between community groups stems from a desire to protect their individual strategies for future funding:

*“...we are absolutely falling over ourselves with Development Officers... they aren’t good value for money, including my post... what you need to do is to get them together, coordinated. There’s no coordination between all these people. They barely speak to each other... they don’t want to give too much away in case somebody else takes that idea and runs with it... They need to produce a report every year to justify their existence. I’ve seen these reports and they’re scandalous...”*

Interview: Liam, Arlen

This was echoed almost exactly in an interview the following day with Kirsty, a Local Authority ‘Community Coordinator’ whose job is to assist and facilitate community-led activity on the island. She notes that her job is often complicated by the fact that many groups don’t want to discuss their plans and activities in case their ideas are stolen by others:

*“...my job is really making sure that people know what other people are up to – if they want it to be known – because there’s always sensitivities... competing for the same funding, you know? Trying to get that very fine line between social enterprises... who are in a competitive situation and want to keep their cards very close to their chest, versus the fact that I think that that’s not a particularly good way for people to operate.”*

Interview: Kirsty, Arlen

The influence of local politics and competition was a surprisingly significant element of everyday life within both CCF groups and in both circumstances there was stark evidence of an ongoing rivalry with specific local community groups.

I discovered that TT existed within a complex web of local politics and entrenched rivalry. Two members of TT, the chairman and the PM, were both heavily involved in the Green Party campaign in the upcoming local elections and, as such, had stirred up a body of politically-motivated opposition amongst some of the community's Conservative Party supporters who suggested that TT was a political tool to promote the Green Party. In addition, two of the Conservative supporters were themselves responsible for a second CCF initiative in the same community (Focus on Thornton (FoT)). The two groups began as one unfunded group of a few individuals who volunteered to collect cans from local pubs and restaurants for recycling. As the group's ambitions developed, the members began to disagree about pivotal issues, most notably, the Conservative members did not support a community wind turbine proposal that the Green members wanted to put forward. As a result, they divided into two separate organisations to pursue their own interests: TT and FoT. Although both have since been successful in securing separate CCF grants, there is a high level of residual personal and political resentment and the two groups refuse to collaborate. FoT believes that TT stole much of their strategy in order to secure funding, while TT were adamant that I must be careful not to pass on any information to members of FoT if I met with them as they didn't want me to reveal anything about TT's strategy.

This level of secrecy and mistrust was also observed in the island community. During my time with AET, I encountered another community-led initiative (Loch Trust) operating in the same community who, although not currently CCF-funded, appeared to have a similar remit to AET. Similarly to the lowland scenario, AET and Loch Trust had attempted, but failed, to work together on a previous grant-funded initiative. On this occasion, a large international charity had contacted both groups and encouraged them to work together on an application for a grant that had become available for local development projects. They were successful in securing the funding but AET was unhappy with the way the project developed, leaving Loch Trust to work with the charity alone. During the participant observation period, an article was published in a national newspaper explaining that Loch Trust was planning to set up a local radio

station with the charity funding. AET were already heavily involved in a separate bid to establish a radio station to serve the same community, but this was the first they had heard about Loch Trust's radio station project. I arranged to meet with Loch Trust and discovered that they were aware of the radio station AET was involved in but had purposefully not wanted to collaborate. They wanted to launch as an online station by themselves as quickly as possible to make a statement to the other group. The groups have subsequently both continued to pursue their own projects, leading to unnecessary duplication of effort and resources.

## 7.2 The double-edged sword of the CCF

In both AET and TT, participation in the CCF has provided the resources to install renewable energy infrastructure, create allotment spaces and poly tunnels, carry out energy efficiency audits throughout the community, offer a recycling service, host local food events, and assist with local 'EcoSchools' projects. These projects have delivered clear and tangible outputs which are unlikely to have happened without public funding. However, these types of projects do not necessarily capitalise upon the aforementioned unique position that community-led initiatives can have within a community. Evidence from Arlen and Thornton demonstrates that, once in receipt of top-down funding, community organisations are required to take on a more business-like form, competing with others for the resources (and authority) to deliver certain services.

The CCF requirement for measurable CO<sub>2</sub>e reductions within the lifetime of the funding (of between one and three years) will necessarily direct the type of initiative a group undertakes. As the most reliable means of achieving short-term carbon savings is considered to be through physical measures and simple behaviour changes (Brook Lyndhurst and Ecometrica, 2011), it follows that these are the types of projects that are most likely to be proposed and subsequently accepted for funding. For example, of the 89 projects funded by the CCF in 2012, 36 (40%) were focused solely on auditing home energy use and providing building insulation. These measures are of no cost to the individual and will start to deliver small carbon savings immediately.

However, there is some uncertainty about the long-term contribution these small behaviour changes can make to the broader sustainability agenda. Crompton and Thøgersen have critiqued the tendency of government policy initiatives to focus on

“simple and painless private-sphere behaviour changes” (2009:26). The authors suggest that, in terms of a wider sustainability strategy, the only reason for targeting these types of small-scale changes is to act as precursors to larger-scale behaviour change (a ‘spillover’ effect), or to initiate more active involvement in the political process (the ‘foot in the door’ effect). However, Crompton and Thøgersen note that these secondary effects are unpredictable and unreliable. There is evidence to suggest that, rather than encouraging the uptake of other aspects of a sustainable lifestyle, individuals who adopt one pro-environmental behaviour may see it as a way of off-setting other environmentally detrimental behaviours, leading to a negative spillover (or rebound) effect (e.g. Sorrell, 2010; Chitnis *et al*, 2013; Chitnis *et al*, 2014). The 2011 CCF review also reported very limited evidence of a positive spillover effect and noted that “Even where projects were deliberately trying to catalyse spillover, this... very rarely worked when the promoted behaviours were, in their eyes, unconnected.” (Brook Lyndhurst and Ecometrica, 2011: 31).

The observations from Arlen and Thornton also suggest that, whilst a group may have long-term ambitions to alter the underlying values and norms of their community at their heart, by participating in the CCF the initiative risks being – or at least giving the impression of being – a relatively short-term endeavour, beginning and ending with the provision of funding. This is perpetuated by the stipulation built into the CCF that groups cannot reapply for funding to continue the same project, but must be expanding or evolving in some respect. Evidence was found in both AET and TT to suggest that the need for constant innovation and new ideas perpetuated a degree of secrecy and protectiveness over current and future strategies. This is clearly somewhat at odds with the notion of community-led projects as open and inclusive. It also runs counter to the observed opinion among funding bodies and the community initiatives themselves that making connections and forming networks with other community organisations is an important source of information and support (Park, 2011).

Of course, the CCF is just one source of grants for community-led initiatives in an extensive and diverse range of funding options. As the Third Sector is an increasingly important element of development strategies across the whole of Scotland (Woolvin, 2012), it seems pertinent to understand whether the limitations observed in the two case studies are symptomatic of the particular design and management of the CCF, or



whether they are inherent restraints of grant funding for community-led sustainability initiatives. The remainder of this chapter therefore seeks to investigate this question. Following a brief attempt to map the landscape of grant funding for community initiatives in Scotland, I go on to present and discuss the findings from six qualitative interviews with managers and directors of community-led sustainability initiatives across Scotland.

### 7.3 The broader landscape of grant funding in Scotland

The CCF sits within a somewhat chaotic landscape of funding options for community-led initiatives across Scotland. Broadly speaking, funding providers can be divided into three categories: Public Sector (including Local Authority, Scottish Government, UK Government, and European Union funds); National Lottery; and other grant-making trusts. Across these categories, there are a huge number of grants, ranging from multi-million pound UK-wide grant funding programmes, to very localised private trusts offering communities a few hundred pounds at a time. In addition to the extent and diversity of grants, the availability of funding is also extremely dynamic, with funding streams frequently switched on or off according to demand and funder priorities. As a result, it is almost impossible to ‘map the landscape’ of all grant funding for community activity in Scotland in a useful or manageable way.

Therefore, in an attempt to illustrate the funding context within which the CCF fits, Figure 7.1 and Table 7.1 provide an overview of the most significant Scotland-wide funds for community-led projects promoting sustainable lifestyles available at the time of the research. This includes all funds which community-led groups in Scotland can apply to for grants totalling £10,000 or more for projects which have ambitions to encourage more sustainable lifestyles locally. The concept of sustainable lifestyles – and projects that could be deemed to promote them – is of course contested and subjective, but the funds included are those which state support for projects with an environmental or community development focus within their criteria. As the graph shows, public sector programmes dominate the provision of these types of funds.

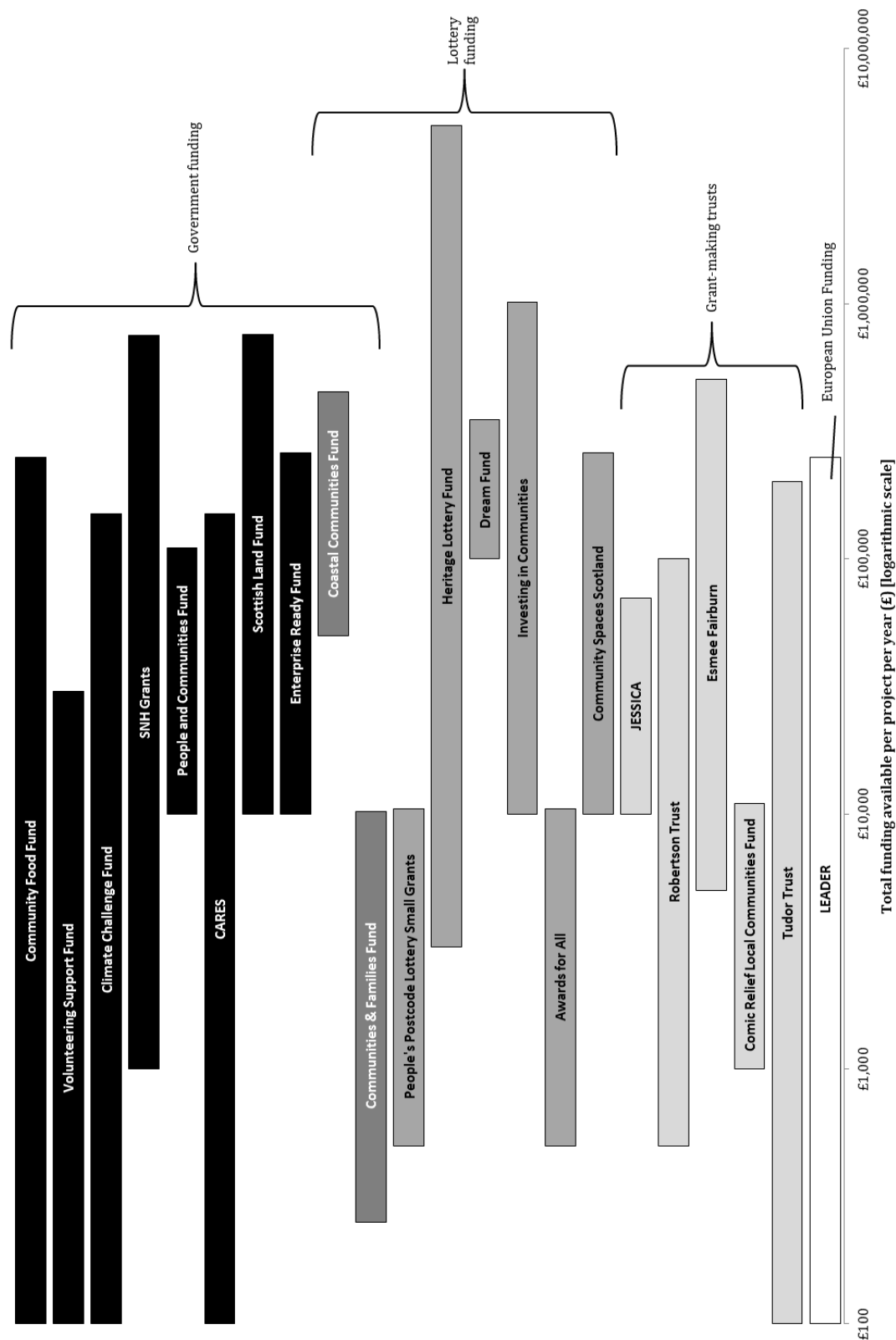


Figure 7.1 : Graph showing the ranges in value of Scotland-wide grants for community-led sustainability projects  
Grant values are presented on a log scale starting at £100 with base 10. N.B. Grants represented by bars beginning at £100 do not set a minimum grant value

In addition to those shown on the graph, most Local Authorities will provide grants to community initiatives which meet local needs and local government priorities.

However, the level and duration of funding, as well as the means by which community groups are supported, vary significantly across Scotland. The grants shown in the graph were systematically categorised and compared according to a number of variables, including the amount of funding available, maximum length of projects, types of work that would be supported, application process, payment procedures, and reporting and monitoring requirements. The intention of this was to identify patterns and trends across the spectrum of funds. However, this exercise served primarily to highlight the huge variation between funds, not only in terms of the variables above, but also in the quality and quantity of information about the grants that is readily available online. This complexity can, in itself, be a barrier to community initiatives accessing funding, as was highlighted in the interviews discussed in the following section.

From Table 7.2 it can be seen that the majority of grants are available for project durations of between one and three years. As would be expected, the maximum duration of the projects supported rises broadly in line with the amount available in response to the need for a longer time period to complete larger projects. Grants also vary in the level of support that will be provided. Many grants will only provide a percentage of the total project costs in order to encourage community groups to source 'match funding' from other sources. This prevents groups relying too heavily on a single income source and spreads the investment burden for funders.

The criteria for grants vary significantly in specificity. Many grants identify particular outcomes that they are expecting community groups to achieve, while others, especially private trusts, give much broader categories of activity that will be funded. This variation in the level of compliance and detail required from the funder is also reflected in many of the other aspects of the grant, for example, the application and monitoring requirements. The application requirements vary very significantly across funds. For some grants, the requirements may be a little as a two-page application letter, whilst applications for other grants can involve the collation of extensive and detailed information packs, incorporating an application form, a business plan, an options analysis, a community survey, and letters of support.

Grant Name	Funding Source	Maximum duration	Maximum value
Community Food Fund	Scottish Government	1 year	£25,000
Volunteering Support Fund	Scottish Government	1 year	£30,000
Climate Challenge Fund	Scottish Government	March 2016	£450,000
SNH Grants*	Scottish Government	3 year years	£1,000,000
People & Communities Fund	Scottish Government	March 2015	£100,000
CARES*	Scottish Government	Unspecified	£100,000
Scottish Land Fund	Scottish Government	3 years	£750,000
Enterprise Ready Fund*	Scottish Government	March 2015	£100,000
Coastal Communities Fund	UK Gov. + Lottery	2 years	£400,000
Communities and Families Fund	Scottish Gov. + Lottery	1 year	£10,000
Postcode Lottery (Small Grants)	Lottery	6 months	£10,000
Heritage Lottery Fund*	Lottery	10 years	£5,000,000
Dream Fund	Lottery	2 years	£100,000
Investing in Communities	Lottery	5 years	£1,000,000
Awards for All	Lottery	1 year	£100,000
Community Spaces Scotland	Lottery	2 years	£250,000
JESSICA (Scotland) Trust	Trust	Unspecified	£60,000
Robertson Trust	Trust	5 years	£100,000
Esmée Fairbairn Foundation*	Trust	5 years	£100,000
Comic Relief Local Communities	Trust	Unspecified	£10,000
Tudor Trust	Trust	3 years+ **	£200,000
LEADER*	EU	Variable	£250,000

\* Funds incorporate more than one grant programme which have been aggregated for the purpose of this summary.

\*\* The Tudor Trust will offer initial grants up to 3 years but will consider extending for an addition 2 years.

**Table 7.2: Scotland-wide grants for community-led sustainability projects**

All the grants reviewed request some form of evaluation of the project being funded.

Again, the quantity and detail of information requested varies substantially. For some,

the supported groups are asked to complete an evaluation form at the end of the grant to provide funders with a record of what the group has achieved during the funding period. For other funders, reporting is expected on a much more regular basis, sometimes, as with the CCF, this must be done every month, with high levels of detail about the way in which the money has been spent. The means by which the grants are paid to community groups also varies; some grants are issued up-front, either as a lump sum or in regular instalments, while others are paid upon completion of the project and require receipts and invoices for costs to be reimbursed.

## 7.4 Funding community-led sustainability initiatives across Scotland

In order to investigate experiences with grant funding for community-led sustainability initiatives beyond those encountered in the two case studies, I conducted interviews with managers and directors of six community initiatives across rural Scotland (see Table 7.3). As explained in Chapter Four (p.82), these groups were selected by searching through the lists of recipients of each of the grants identified during the mapping exercise for those in a rural location which had been awarded a grant from more than one funding body. Groups were also chosen so as to represent as broad a range of groups as possible, with the groups' objectives ranging from community food, to environmental education, to community development.

I.D.	Type of group	Interviewee role	Location	Date of interview
CFR1	Community Company	Project Manager	Wester Ross	Nov 2013
CFR2	Community Association	Project Manager	Inner Hebrides	Nov 2013
CFR3	Development Trust	Project Manager	Stirlingshire	Nov 2013
CFR4	Development Trust	Project Manager	Argyll and Bute	Nov 2013
CFR5	Community Company	Project Manager	Northern Isles	Dec 2013
CFR6	Development Trust	Director	Outer Hebrides	Dec 2013

**Table 7.3: Overview of interviews conducted for funding review**

The questions were designed to draw out experiences with different grant schemes, with the intention of gaining a better understanding of how the design of funding schemes influences the projects being delivered. The findings from the interviews unanimously supported the observations from Thornton and Arlen that the timescales and

administration demands attached to grant funding can restrict and complicate community-led projects. Interview findings also supported and broadened the argument that grant funding fails to empower ‘the community’ to act autonomously, which arguably ultimately undermines the notion of a community-led initiative. From these findings it may be inferred, therefore, that the move away from grant funding, towards more self-sufficient financial models for the community sector may be more appropriate. This was found to be an ambition of many of the groups interviewed. However, interview evidence corroborated the notion that a move towards a ‘business-like’ approach can lead to a degree of dislocation between the group and the community in which they are working. These observations and analyses will now be expanded and discussed. In each case, quotations from the interviews are presented anonymously, with the origin only identified by the interview I.D. shown in Table 7.3.

#### ***7.4.1 The timescales and administration demands of grant funding***

Grants available to community-based organisations are most commonly for the delivery of a specific project with clear, measurable outcomes within defined time limits. This may be a fixed period of time, for example a year, or may be a deadline date, such as by March 2015. The data in the previous section shows that the majority of large grants are available for a period of two years or less. This was confirmed in the interviews, where the most consistent message to emerge from community groups was the difficulty faced in trying to secure long-term support.

There are clearly many justifiable reasons for funders to set deadlines on grant expenditure. The ‘outcome-based approach’ gives funders a straightforward means by which to measure the success of the community initiative in question, and all the community groups interviewed acknowledged the importance of accountability and fair distribution of grants, particularly in the case of public funding. It is reasonable to expect a specific project or outcome to be achieved within a period of time as agreed by the community organisation. However, it is an inescapable reality that the majority of community initiatives are established in order to pursue a long-term, multi-faceted local agenda, extending far beyond the delivery of a single project. The fundamental incongruence between the delivery deadline attached to a specific grant and the long-term nature of community-level development has ramifications which can ultimately hamper the overall efficacy of the organisation to achieve its ambitions in the long run:

*“That’s one of the issues with the grant funding, three years simply isn’t long enough to hit the aspirational goals that you really want. It takes a good couple of years to get the community to understand properly what a large project’s about...so you spend that time educating, and then you’re trying to get all the action done, but actually you’ve got very little time to do it...”*

(CFR3)

The scarcity of long-term grants, coupled with the requirement from many funders to source some level of ‘match funding’, means that, in order to meet the group’s underlying ambitions, finding, applying for, and managing a number of different grants is a necessary, ongoing activity for many community groups.

The assumption from the observations in Arlen and Thornton that the complexity of the CCF application process alone could be enough to deter groups was supported in the interviews:

*“We were going to put a bid in to the CCF... we didn’t in the end because it became quite an arduous task to be honest with you, as, I’m sure you know, most grant funding is...When I was director last year, I could have easily spent 15 hours a week just looking for and applying for funding... I would like a grant to employ someone to do nothing but apply for grants!”*

(CFR4)

For most of the groups interviewed, much (if not all) of this time-consuming work is taken on by a paid staff member. However, all groups reported the difficulty of securing funds to cover administrative staff costs and, therefore, the general administration of the community group, including applying for funds for future projects, is commonly completed by the manager of an existing funded project. This inevitably distracts resource from the fundamental purpose of the project:

*“[PM 1]’s time became very, very focussed on running an office and doing all of that, and she did a lot less – she’d admit it herself – she had projects, but the reality was that it was [PM 2] who was running the projects, and she was doing the [administration] – that’s how it worked out in the end.”*

(CFR6)

As well as meeting day-to-day administration and management demands, community organisations need to plan future development in order to progress beyond the end of

the currently-funded project. Few funders will continue to reissue grants to community groups to continue pursuing the same activities for which they have already received funding. As observed with the CCF in Arlen and Thornton, in order to continue to secure grants, community groups must demonstrate new areas of development and growth. However, in order for groups to develop and progress, sufficient resources must be invested in formulating robust action plans and future strategies. Therefore, the lack of funding for ongoing management and development of the community initiative more broadly, as opposed to a specific project, poses a significant threat to the long-term viability of much community-led action. The minimal availability of funding for general development staff was highlighted in many interviews as a serious limiting factor for community groups, as these excerpts demonstrate:

*“Funding for staff, I think, is just critical. I could reel off three or four different projects to you right now that would make a massive difference, long-term difference as well ...and all it needs is a body, paid for, for a year”.*

(CFR4)

*“There should be a lot more funding for employing people. The [PM] isn’t supposed to do all the administration for the company... A part-time administrator would be hugely useful... but it’s very difficult to get somebody, and if you do get somebody it will be for a limited period of time and in that time you’re supposed to find a way of funding that person”.*

(CFR3)

*“The problem is, there’s only one of me, and you have so much you would like to do...”*

(CFR1)

The difficulty of finding funding for the sufficient staffing of community groups means that the employees that are taken on have a heavy workload much beyond their paid remit which can lead to a high turnover of staff:

*“We ask an awful lot from the people we get in. In a perfect world we would have several members of staff at that level”*

(CFR4)

This is further confounded by the fact that many grants are issued on a one- or two-year basis which provides very little job security for potential employees. As groups commonly have to re-apply each year, sometimes to different funding bodies, to secure



salaries, employees are often left in a position where they do not know whether their job is going to continue or not until the last minute. A number of the groups interviewed recounted experiences of having to issue redundancy notices to valued staff members because the group could not guarantee that there would be sufficient funds to cover the post in time. Even if the funding is then granted, it is sometimes too late to retain that staff member, as the following example illustrates:

*“We didn’t know until the very last minute [whether we could have the funding]... I had five days left of my contract when I found out... Unfortunately [another member of staff] had already decided to go into business with [someone else] so we lost him and he was good... he really, really, instantly clicked with the community as well. So then we had to bring in another person, who is fantastic as well, but he’s had to spend his first year getting used to the community...”*

(CFR3)

As this interview extract demonstrates, due to the low staffing numbers, much of the expertise of a community group will be held within one or two members of staff. Consequently, these individuals are extremely valuable to the group and so securing a long-term position for them enables much greater efficiency and faster development. However, the nature of grant funding is such that it can be very difficult to provide the job security required to retain these valuable members of staff.

#### **7.4.2 Local democracy and community ‘empowerment’**

Interviewees recognised and stressed the value of empowering communities to have more influence over local development, as one PM stated:

*“...I think it’s important to support communities to do that work because it isn’t something that Local Authorities or central government can do because every community is different. And I think the more they realise that, and the more they support that – the local focus and the local needs – the better that will be....”*

(CFR6)

‘Community empowerment’ is regularly cited, in both academic and policy contexts, as a central benefit of community-led approaches, and has become an increasingly significant part of UK and Scottish Government policy. As the 2010 UK Government Coalition Agreement states:

*“The Government believes that it is time for a fundamental shift of power from Westminster to people... We will promote the radical devolution of power and greater financial autonomy to local government and community groups...”*

HM Government (2010b: 11)

Community empowerment has taken an equally central role within Scottish Government discourse and strategy over recent years: “...community empowerment - the ability of people to do things for themselves - forms a key plank of the Scottish Government’s approach to delivering a more successful Nation.” (Scottish Government and COSLA, 2009: 5). The ‘Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill’ is now in progress and aims to give communities more influence over local service provision and make it easier for communities to acquire local assets (Scottish Government, 2013c). In line with this, many grant schemes for community sustainability initiatives also include direct reference to ‘community empowerment’ amongst their core aims.

However, when the existence of a community organisation is supported, fully or partially, by grant funding, there is an inevitable imbalance of power between the community group and the organisation that is providing the funding. With the exception of some private trust funds, the vast majority of grants are made available through funding schemes which have been set up to deliver specific outcomes. Whilst broad notions of community development and engagement are almost always part of the aims of the funding, there is usually a set of more tightly defined criteria which projects must meet, and often a specific set of outcomes that the project must be aiming to deliver in order to be funded. This is of course particularly true for government-funded grants, such as the CCF, which are linked to specific policy objectives.

As has been discussed above, it is undoubtedly legitimate, if not necessary, for grants to be distributed according to a set of outcomes the funders are striving to achieve. However, the inevitable consequence is that, in order to receive funding, community groups must adhere to top down priorities. As one community organisation manager said:

*“If you have national priorities that the government, either national or local, are putting money into...then the organisations have got to go with that flow, move with that flow, but also predict that flow to see where the funding streams are going to be...”*

(CFR2)

When the priorities of the community organisation in question naturally align with the priorities of the funders then grants issued in this way can be effective. However, there is a risk that, in order to secure the funds to operate, community initiatives alter their ambitions and direction to fit with a top-down perception of what is needed. Evidence from interviews supported this, as the following excerpts demonstrate:

*“The pot is getting smaller and the need is getting greater... Some of the time you’ve perhaps got to tailor the project to fit the money”*

(CFR1)

*“We have advertised for a development officer, part-time... We reckon it will be more than half-time but [the funders] insisted that we put more money into paying the consultants and that left less money for the actual development officer. So we just have to go along with what they tell you...”*

(CFR6)

These findings support previous research which has identified a significant gap between the rhetoric and implementation of community empowerment (Taylor and Wilson, 2006; Adamson and Bromiley, 2008). Namely, whilst the potential benefits of community empowerment have been increasingly extolled across the public sector, “the statutory sector has largely failed to respond to the community agenda and there is little evidence of community influence over budgets, service delivery, prioritisation of issues and general bending of mainstream services to reflect the partnership process” (Adamson and Bromiley, 2006: 59).

Evans *et al* (2013a) suggest that effective and democratic local governance depends on the co-operation of different forms of local institutions, namely, community initiatives, local government, and local service providers. For the majority of the community groups interviewed, the Local Authority (LA) was broadly supportive of the work being done, and many of the groups were in receipt, or had previously received, some financial support from the LA. However, none of the groups reported a very close working relationship or partnership with their LA. Whilst LAs were often identified as ostensibly supportive, they were considered by some interviewees to be somewhat dislocated from community-scale development. Many rural communities have established community councils, which, in theory, should be democratically elected and accountable bodies which “*bridge the gap between local authorities and communities*” (Scottish

Government, 2013d: para.1). However, the majority of interviewees believed that many community councils are ineffectual in practice on account of their design; community councils are not able to own assets, have a very limited budget and have no decision-making power. Consequently, many community-led development organisations have formed in rural communities in response to a gap in local governance, and can be viewed as an alternative form of “grassroots participatory democracy” (Stott and Longhurst, 2011: 107).

However, as discussed above, the projects pursued by groups reliant on grant funding remain largely controlled by the funding that is available. In order to achieve ‘community empowerment’, power, as well as resources, must be given to communities. One way in which communities are being encouraged to take control is through obtaining an income-generating asset which will provide sufficient resources to support local projects.

#### *7.4.3 Income generation: a solution to grant funding?*

There is emphasis within the Scottish Government on the role of the community sector in contributing towards the Scottish economy (Scottish Government, 2010, 2013a). Several grant schemes in Scotland are designed to help communities take control of local assets, such as land, town halls and community shops, in the hope of reducing ongoing grant-dependency and assisting a move towards self-sufficiency.

Community organisations that provide goods or services may have the option to generate revenue through tendering for public sector contracts. Many of the grants issued by Local Authorities are for the delivery of outcomes which meet local government priorities. Therefore, commercial contracts between the government and the community organisation are considered to be a more transparent means by which to utilise the skills and knowledge within the community sector to deliver local or national government objectives effectively (Coburn, 2012).

There are also public resources available to encourage social enterprise and ‘community interest companies’ and facilitate community groups to think and act in a more ‘business-like’ manner, such as the Scottish Investment Fund. In Scotland, renewable energy, particularly wind and hydro, provides exciting and potentially very lucrative development opportunities for many communities with access to suitable land and

sufficient grid capacity. The Communities and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES) and the Renewable Energy Investment Fund (REIF) both provide loans to support community renewable energy schemes, an opportunity that was well-recognised by the rural community organisations interviewed:

*“Where there is the chance for the community to put up a turbine, and have the income from the turbine to be self-sufficient, whilst also providing an energy source in their community, I think things like that are a brilliant idea... you’re not constantly standing waiting for a hand out, you’re able to generate your own money...but you’ve had some help in getting it there in the first place”*

(CFR5)

However, despite all having some means of revenue generation, none of the community groups interviewed were in a position where they were able to cover the costs of all their activities without grant funding. Most community sector organisations emerge to fill a gap in the provision of public goods and services, rather than in response to a business opportunity. Therefore, many are not viable independent businesses due an inadequate profit margin (Senscot, 2012). For example, rural community groups may invest in a local shop in order to keep it open when a private owner is no longer able to sustain it and, despite the fact that the service is crucial to some remote rural communities, this type of marginal investment will struggle to even cover its running costs, let alone generate a profit. Therefore, even when community organisations have clear, robust business plans, it is extremely challenging to generate enough income to become self-sufficient. One manager in a remote rural community recounted the difficulty they have had meeting their costs through the community company:

*“We were trying to get ourselves in a position where we were self-sustaining... We’ve been working to a five-year business plan, but [here] it’s so incredibly hard to find income generating projects that are going to generate enough money... So it’s been really difficult to try and become – to stand on our own two feet ... it’s taken – well, I mean, next year we’ll be 10 years old!”*

(CFR5)

There is, perhaps, an irreconcilable tension between the values, ambitions and practices of community sector organisations, and those inherent in a ‘business-like’ approach. One of the benefits often cited by proponents of a community-led approach to encouraging more sustainable behaviours is the value of being embedded within the

community you are trying to influence. However, evidence from the interviews conducted supported the findings from Arlen and Thornton that one of the implications of growing and developing a community organisation can be a need to somewhat withdraw from the community within which it operates as the management of the organisation becomes more time-consuming.

As a community organisation becomes more complex and strategic, the group's perspective is likely to shift and there can be a benefit from having a slightly detached relationship with the community. For example, one community organisation manager, discussing the fact that she does not live in the community that the group represents, stated:

*"I find it really positive... [living outside the village] helps me to make choices that are not emotive choices and are more rational, and yet I can use my colleagues who are embedded within the village to get the feel for, you know, 'How much of an impact is this going to have on village politics?', so we can balance it out. It's really good to have both sides of the story there because if you're too embedded in a village then all you're decisions are based on, 'Oh gosh, I don't want to make them mad, and so-and-so is my friend'.*

(CFR3)

This view was supported by another community development officer who felt that she needed a clearer division between her job and her involvement in community activities. As the organisation's responsibilities for goods and services in the community increases, so does the amount of pressure that is placed on the group and its employees:

*"When you live in the community you're doing the community development in...you just can't get away from work. If you go out, somebody wants to tackle you about something.... So it's quite suffocating".*

(CFR1)

These findings demonstrate that, as a community organisation grows and develops, taking on increasing responsibility for community development projects, there is a risk that the group will, perhaps counterintuitively, become *less* connected to the community, as it struggles to balance its community-orientated ambitions with its management responsibilities.

## 7.5 Summary

Overall, my findings in this chapter have demonstrated that there is a marked incongruence between narratives of bottom-up community empowerment within funding schemes such as the CCF, and the top-down restrictions placed on community groups by those funding bodies. It has been observed that the administration demands and short timescales attached to funding can be detrimental to the long-term success of community projects. In line with previous observations in the literature (e.g. Seyfang and Smith, 2007; Rowe and Robbins, 2000), I found that funders' expectations for tangible outcomes within short periods of time is fundamentally discordant with the organic, unstructured development and long-term agendas of community-led groups.

In order to gain the resources required, community group leaders reported a need to adapt their projects' aims and ambitions to meet the requirements of the funders. This, it can be argued, fundamentally undermines the concept of a "community led" project, as the direction of the project is largely being led from the top down by the funders, that is, in the case of the CCF, by central government.

An apparent solution to this is for community initiatives to avoid grant funding by generating an income of their own. However, interview findings illuminated the complications and challenges associated with turning community groups into revenue generating enterprises. For many community groups, revenue generation is simply impossible. Community organisations often exist within a market failure; that is, communities are forced to provide particular local goods or services for themselves because it is not economically viable to provide these through a sustainable commercial business. Even if community groups are able to generate sufficient income through their projects to sustain themselves, the need for a competitive and strategic approach can lead organisations to become increasingly detached from the communities they serve.

In the following section I will synthesise all that has been learnt from my fieldwork. Chapter Eight seeks to knit the findings from Chapters Five, Six, and Seven into the existing literature on the politics of 'community' in a discussion which pivots on the question of whether schemes such as the CCF are, in fact, a democratic or effective means of encouraging more sustainable lifestyles at the local level.

# PART III

– *Synthesis* –



## 8 Discussion

*“Creating sustainable lifestyles means rethinking our ways of living, how we buy and what we consume but, it is not only that. It also means rethinking how we organize our daily life, altering the way we socialize, exchange, share, educate, and build identities.”*

UNEP (2011: 6)

The findings and analysis in the preceding three chapters are presented in a way intended to reflect the development and evolution of this thesis. My findings are embedded within the reflexive, iterative analysis that occurred alongside them, illustrating how central recurring refrains within the data emerged, and the lens of inquiry was progressively calibrated as research questions developed.

The purpose of this chapter is to draw these concepts together alongside the existing literature to consider the whole of what has been learnt about the position and influence of community-led initiatives in encouraging more sustainable lifestyles in remote rural Scotland. In what follows, I seek to root my inductive, observation-led findings and analysis within the relevant contemporary theory and debate.

I begin with an exploration of the rhetoric and reality of ‘community’ in the CCF, discussing how my observations support a body of literature which problematizes the notion of ‘the community’ as a spatial unit through which to enact policy ambitions. Specifically, I argue that the perception of ‘the community’ as a homogeneous, self-contained unit is well-recognised to be a naïve reading of reality, with geographic communities most often comprised of multiple, sometimes conflicting, ‘communities-within-communities’. However, in order to turn community into a manageable unit at which to enact policy ambitions, policymakers actively simplify the notion of community. I discuss how, in doing this, the CCF arguably represents an example of Rose’s (1996: 332) concept of ‘government through community’.

I argue that the over-simplification of the notion of community within the CCF can lead to an incorrect assumption that the community groups being funded are able to speak

on behalf of the geographic community. I suggest that my findings in the previous three chapters have demonstrated that, in reality, those involved in AET and TT are a specific sub-set of 'the community' and it is, therefore, misleading to suggest that they represent the interests of the geographic community as a whole. Instead of being representatives of the pre-existing geographic community, groups such as AET and TT create *new* communities-within-communities. Therefore, the investment of resources into CCF groups, rather than building social capital throughout the geographic communities, creates isolated pockets of social capital within the communities. Whilst this is beneficial for those within the group, it can be detrimental for those outside it. Drawing on Little (2002), I argue that, through the pursuit of instrumental objectives, groups such as AET and TT in fact weaken traditional community values.

I conclude by suggesting that the pursuit of a traditional sense of place-based community as an *end* of sustainability policy is misdirected and, ultimately unachievable. 'Community' is not a single, bounded entity, but is a messy amalgamation of subjective, fluid, and overlapping groups of social relations. As Evans *et al* (2013a) suggest, effective local governance depends upon balancing grassroots community-led action with more representative forms of local government. I, therefore, argue that, not only is there a need for funding mechanisms to become flexible enough to account for the organic, unstructured nature of grassroots activity, but there also needs to be a radical re-empowerment of local democratic institutions in order to ensure an equitable distribution of costs and benefits at the local level.

## 8.1 The rhetoric and reality of 'the community'

As discussed in Chapter Five, 'community' is frequently identified as an important component of sustainable development. Not only is the community level considered to be an effective scale at which to encourage pro-environmental, low-carbon behaviours (Preston *et al*, 2009; Heiskanen *et al*, 2010; Mulugetta *et al*, 2010; Middlemiss, 2011a, 2011b), 'the community' is also believed to embody the relationships of trust and support needed to achieve social and economic sustainability (Putnam, 2000; Pretty and Ward, 2001; Peters and Jackson, 2008; Dale and Newman, 2008). These two roles, defined in my analysis of community as the *means* and the *ends* of sustainability policy respectively, are often considered to be co-constitutive. Participation in community-led

(climate change mitigation) initiatives is believed to be effective in strengthening and empowering communities and, consequently, making them more resilient and more able to successfully pursue initiatives in the future (Assadourian, 2008).

On the surface, the CCF appears to be an embodiment of this rationale within policymaking:

*“The CCF provides funding for community groups to tackle climate change. It has an annual fund of over £10 million per year, until March 2016, to support community-led projects that reduce carbon emissions, make community improvements and help communities cope with the impacts of climate change.”*

KSB (no date(3): para.2)

This quote demonstrates how the administrators of the CCF envision the funded projects to be a way of catalysing the community to make “improvements” and become more resilient to change. However, my findings from Arlen and Thornton raise a number of significant questions about the validity of this rationale. At the most fundamental level, attempts to translate this theory of community-led action into reality were observed to be complicated by the inherent plurality and subjective nature of ‘community’, which resulted in an inconsistency between the ‘community’ that were the *means* of the project, and the ‘community’ of the *ends*.

The tendency of the CCF, and (consequently) AET and TT, to operationalise ‘the community’ as a fixed, place-based entity, has been demonstrated in my findings (p.104) to be at odds with the transient, multi-layered, heterogeneous reality of community in the two case study locations. In both Arlen and Thornton, ‘community’ was observed to be a subjective and elastic concept, which supports a large body of existing sociological literature identifying the notion of ‘community’ to be ambiguous, indistinct, and romantic (e.g. Plant, 1974; Bauman, 2001; Taylor, 2003). It is well recognised that perceived community boundaries are not static, universal truths, but are subjective and symbolic, as Anthony Cohen explains:

*“...to say that community boundaries are often symbolic in character is not only to suggest that they imply different meaning for different people. It also suggests that boundaries perceived by some may be utterly imperceptible to others.”*

Cohen (1987: 14)

These findings support observations within much of the existing literature on community-scale initiatives in a wide variety of contexts. There is a particularly large body of critical literature regarding the interpretation of community as a homogeneous, spatially-defined unit within ‘community-based natural resource management’ (CBNRM) projects (e.g. Agrawal and Gibson, 1999; Kellert *et al.*, 2000; Natcher and Hickey, 2002; Kumar, 2005; de Beer, 2012). A recent example comes from Stone and Nyaupane (2013) who, in an examination of CBNRM in Botswana, observe that, “The major challenges of CBNRM projects were associated with how the concept of *community* is conceptualized and defined” (p.5, emphasis as original). The authors identify that CBNRM tends to favour a one-size-fits-all approach, whereby ‘the community’ of CBNRM is founded on the assumption that geographic community members have shared interests or common bonds. However, “The reality is that communities, more often than not, are made up of an agglomeration of factions and interest groups often locked in competitive relationships” (p.4).

Stone and Nyaupane’s (2013) observations, that ‘the community’ is most usually comprised of various, sometimes conflicting, factions and interest groups, supports my findings and analysis from Arlen and Thornton, where the geographic communities encompassed multiple and diverse ‘social categories’ (Turner and Reynolds, 2011) which serve to segment the population into various complementary and conflicting examples of ‘communities-within-communities’ (Halseth, 1993). For example, in both Arlen and Thornton, one of those most apparent distinctions between members of the community was that between ‘incomers’ and ‘locals’. When looking across the literature on community sociology more broadly (beyond the dynamics of community-led projects), there is evidence that this distinction is a pervasive characteristic of everyday life in communities (Crow *et al.*, 2001). However, it is far from being a simple distinction. Previous research has revealed that the tendency for the ‘incomer’ to be positioned as ‘other’ to the ‘local’ is an insufficiently nuanced reading of reality, as lines and criteria demarcating the ‘incomer’ from the ‘local’ are ‘fuzzy’ and subjective (Burnett, 1998). This one distinction only begins to scratch the surface on the depth of complexity and subjectivity inherent in notions of community. ‘Communities’ are fluid and subjective social constructs comprised of multiple ‘communities-within-communities’ which are, in themselves, fluid and subjective constructs.

If the perception of community as a single homogeneous unit is well-recognised to be a naïve and simplistic understanding of reality, questions emerge as to how ‘community’ – a fractured and complex “agglomeration of factions” (Stone and Nyaupane, 2013: 20) – is expected to be harnessed as a tool by which to achieve tangible, policy-orientated outputs through government initiatives (such as the CCF). Discussing this issue, and drawing on the work of Agrawal (1999), Kumar (2005: 282) suggests that “the current focus on ‘community’ is haunted by the conflation of quite different meanings, by confusion of an ideal type with empirical instances, and by the tendency toward simplification”.

Raco and Flint (2001) provide a useful analysis of this tendency towards simplification of ‘community’ within policymaking. Using the concept of ‘place-space tensions’ introduced by Taylor (1999), Raco and Flint (2001) demonstrate how many of the challenges in establishing forms of community participation stem from conflict between “the producers of space and the makers of place” (Taylor, 1999: 12 cited in Raco and Flint, 2001: 590). This argument draws on the long-standing place-space duality within Geography, whereby place is understood to be humanised space: “Places mediate the ways in which individuals and communities interact over difference spatial scales” (Raco and Flint, 2001: 590). Places are “messy” and “chaotic” (Taylor, 1999: 15; Raco and Flint, 2001: 591) and, consequently, governing institutions tend to convert ‘places’ into functional, administrative ‘space’, as Raco and Flint explain:

*“Local governance has often involved the establishment of equal-sized zones or spaces which act as containers in which functional systems of service provision and policy can be developed. These containers act as ‘calculable spaces’ in which community interests are identified, defined and institutionalised by policy makers in ways which facilitate particular types of decision-making or policy implementation”*

Raco and Flint (2001: 591)

This is arguably what was observed with the CCF in my two case studies, where the messy and chaotic reality of ‘community as place’ in Arlen and Thornton is being overridden by a rational and objective comprehension of ‘community as space’ by the CCF, and the groups they support, so as to turn ‘community’ into a manageable, governable unit.

In these observations, very close comparisons can be drawn between the form and function of the CCF and Nikolas Rose's concept of "government through community" (1996: 332) discussed in Chapter Five (p.90), whereby the CCF could be seen as a means of enabling the Scottish Government to use community as a tool of governance.

## 8.2 The instrumental community

Rose (1996) suggests that it is common for programmes of government to presuppose the allegiances of community where they do not immediately appear to exist. Speaking in reference to urban regeneration schemes, Rose states:

*"They attempt to 'empower' the inhabitants of particular inner-city locales by constituting those who reside in a certain locality as 'a' community, by seeking out 'community groups' who can claim to speak 'in the name of community' and by linking them in new ways into the political apparatus"*

Rose (1996: 336).

This resonates strongly with my analysis of the influence of the CCF in Arlen and Thornton, where AET and TT, have been selected for support by the CCF based on their "claim to speak 'in the name of community'".

In both Arlen and Thornton, AET and TT had been set up and were being managed by well-educated, middle-class individuals. This supports existing evidence to suggest that it is characteristic for environmentally and ethically orientated activity to be dominated by the "well-educated societal elite" (Svensson, 2012). The tendency for environmental community action to be a niche pursuit of the middle-classes is a persistent criticism of the movement (Connors and McDonald, 2010; Middlemiss, 2011b; Barr and Devine-Wright, 2012). In a recent examination of the Transitions Town Network (TTN), a "community-led response to the pressures of climate change, fossil fuel depletion" (Aitken, 2012: 92), Aitken (2012) highlights a tendency for a particular select group of people to be involved. He aligns this select group with the 'civic core' (Mohan, 2011), stating, "These people tend to be middle-aged, well educated and live in prosperous areas. They are well resourced – financially, educationally and with time..." (p.96). This 'partial participation' (see Chapter Five, p.109) is arguably an unavoidable inevitability of community-led action and a fundamental flaw of mechanisms of public participation in governance initiatives (McAreevey, 2009). From a community development

perspective, Mansuri and Rao (2004) identify that, even in the most egalitarian societies, a 'community-led' initiative is likely to be dominated by 'social elites' "who tend to be better educated, have fewer opportunity costs on their time, and therefore have the greatest net benefit from participation" (p.30).

In contemplating the potential impact that this may have on community-led projects, it is interesting to consider the analysis of McAra (2009) in her examination of a community regeneration programme funded through the UK Government. The programme in question placed an emphasis on the role of communities in local regeneration, and invited local groups to submit proposals for initiatives. However, McAra (2009) observed that, in practice, the initiative was controlled by policymakers and their selected agents, "resulting in a process which does not necessarily correlate to the needs, skills or indeed the culture of the wider community it purports to represent" (p.322). McAra (2009) asserts that this does not necessarily make the project a failure, as the outcomes of the project may be positive for the wider community, however, she states that, "If an elite group operate within an invited space and purport to represent broader interests, it is entirely misleading to set up these structures and systems of governance and claim that they are acting wholly in the real interests of the community" (p.323).

Although the processes of public participation examined in McAra's case study are very different from those in the CCF, my findings and analysis in Chapter Seven highlighted how, as a result of the stipulations of the grant, involvement in the CCF fundamentally altered the way AET and TT operated, shaped their ambitions, and influenced their position in the community. Therefore, it can be argued that, through participation in the CCF, AET and TT had been linked into "the political apparatus" of the Scottish Government through the KSB Project Officers, through whom the groups' projects were moulded to more closely align with government ambitions. Both AET and TT were obliged to make the objectives of the CCF projects their central priority which, I argue, exacerbated the groups' dislocation and detachment from the wider geographic community they were attempting to represent (p.143).

This argument can be seen to support existing literature which questions the idea that 'community' can, or should, be used to deliver instrumental ends, in the way that it is in the CCF. For example, Adrian Little (2002: 4), echoing Ferdinand Tönnies' concepts of

*Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, argues that it is appropriate to distinguish between “associations”, in which individuals build relations in order to serve a specific purpose, and the traditional concept of “communities”, where individuals associate for non-instrumental reasons. Little suggests that, whilst it is possible for ‘communities’ to engage in instrumental activities, this is likely to cause traditional community virtues, such as friendship, voluntarism, and care, to be superseded by other rationalities: “In this sense the pursuit of instrumental gain, competitive advantage and so on can be undertaken by communities but the virtues that embody communities will be relegated in priority” (2002: 4). If, for the sake of the argument, it is accepted that AET and TT represent the communities of Arlen and Thornton, in their undertaking of the CCF projects they are necessitating that the members of these communities associate for the particular, instrumental purpose of achieving the outputs required by the funders. According to the above line of reasoning, the CCF projects, in their employment of ‘the community’ as the means by which to achieve sustainability ambitions, may be weakening traditional, non-instrumental community relations in Arlen and Thornton rather than strengthening them. This clearly raises significant questions about the ability of any government programme like the CCF – which centres on the mobilisation of communities to achieve specific outputs – to foster “community” in its traditional sense as an output, or ‘end’.

The rationale for schemes such as the CCF rests on the ability for ‘communities’ to take responsibility for elements of their own development. In order for this to be possible, these communities must gain the skills, knowledge, and network of relations that enable them to successfully govern themselves (Herbert-Cheshire and Higgins, 2004). As the perceived deservingness of places for government assistance increasingly depends upon policymakers’ measures of ‘community’, those seeking support must come to adopt the same processes and measures of success as those set by the funding bodies (Amin, 2005). For example, McAreavey (2009) observes that those involved in UK Government-funded community regeneration programmes “must abide by the complex rules of the game, they must operate within predetermined boundaries”. Similarly, in Australia, Herbert-Cheshire and Higgins (2004) find that, “those communities that follow the prescribed paths of development are represented as ‘active’, responsible and worthy of government funding” (p.290). In this way, Rose (1996) suggests, the employment of communities as a conduit through which to govern transforms the



nature of those communities, “invests them with new values, affiliates them to expertise and re-configures relations of exclusion” (p.336).

As discussed in Chapter Six (p.118), it is easily argued that, in its necessary process of boundary drawing, the very notion of community demands elements of both inclusion and exclusion: in order to delineate the group of people with which one belongs, one must unavoidably identify those who do *not* belong (Day, 2006). So much so, Anthony Cohen suggests that, rather than a sense of commonality, communities are in fact perhaps best explained and understood in their partition from other groups:

*“...we might see the essential meanings of community – those propagated as a collective rhetoric, and those imputed to the collectivity by individuals through the medium of their idiosyncratic experiences – as invested in its boundaries, those ideas which discriminate the community from other places and groups”*

Cohen (1987: 14)

The concept of “relations of exclusion” is a recurring theme through Rose’s analysis of government through community (1996, 2000a, 2000b). In the context of criminal justice reforms, he suggests that community has become a means of excluding those citizens who do not conform: “Those who refuse to become responsible and govern themselves ethically have also refused the offer to become members of our moral community” (Rose, 2000a: 1407). The implication here is that the boundaries of ‘community’ change according to new values and expectations prescribed by the underlying rationale of the government policy a community is tasked to deliver. Of course, the geographic boundaries of ‘communities of space’, such as Arlen and Thornton, are, for the purposes of this argument, not transmutable. Therefore, in establishing ‘community-led’ initiatives such as AET and TT, new ‘community’ boundaries must be created which identify those who do, and do not, belong.

### 8.3 ‘Community’: The chicken or the egg?

George Hillery (1955: 199) identified the “hard core” of definitions of community to be ‘area’, ‘common bonds’, and ‘social interaction’. When considering my case studies in this light, it is difficult to dispute that AET and TT embody these central characteristics of ‘community’, as both undoubtedly enabled social interaction and strengthened common bonds between groups of individuals in a shared area. However, the

assumption that AET or TT accurately represented the geographic communities of Arlen or Thornton was observed to be unfounded in both case studies, as only a very small proportion of the population of these two places were leading – or even actively involved in – the ‘community-led’ projects. Consequently, it could be argued that, through the process of forming and developing an action group, the (local and extra-local) individuals involved have created *new* ‘communities-within-communities’. Therefore, instead of a pre-existing, geographic ‘community’ coming together to take action on climate change and drawing on the resources of the CCF for support, in the two case studies, the CCF was acting as a condensation nucleus around which a new ‘community’ has formed.

Using this distinction, AET and TT can be equated with other ‘communities-within-communities’ that were observed in Arlen and Thornton, such as the ‘Gaelic community’, or the ‘church community’. In this way, AET and TT are best understood, not as representatives of all the residents of Arlen or Thornton respectively, but as new ‘communities of interest’. Whilst, on the surface, this may appear to be a matter of semantics, my research has illustrated that the way in which individuals identify themselves and others can have a significant impact on social relations and patterns of local engagement.

Through the CCF, the ‘community’ is operationalised as an individual, bounded unit, and, as such, the funding granted is to ‘the community’ to empower and strengthen that community. However, as has been demonstrated in my case studies, the ‘community’ that is actively involved – and therefore directly benefitting from – the project, is not necessarily aligned with geographic community that is *purported* to be benefitting. Instead, the immediately apparent beneficiaries of the funding are a small sub-section of the wider community. As such, resources intended to strengthen and empower ‘the community’ are being channelled exclusively into a specific group within the community, and there was evidence in both Arlen and Thornton that the perception of this may lead to resentment and rejection of the group locally (p.126).

This was arguably further perpetuated in both my case studies by the fact that both AET and TT had been set up and were being managed by individuals considered locally as ‘incomers’. As discussed in Chapter Six, despite the fluid and inconsistent nature of the criteria for classifying individuals as either ‘incomers’ or ‘locals’, this classification

was observed to be a significant part of identity, and there was a clear association between ‘incomers’ and attempts to facilitate change at the local level. Whilst this was seen as beneficial by some, many local people expressed some resentment and scepticism towards people moving into the area and trying to change the way of life, making direct and indirect references to the notion of the ‘white settler’. The ‘incomer’ label was found to permeate the identity of the groups as a whole and, in turn, influence the way in which AET and TT were perceived and received locally, with evidence to suggest that the incomer identity of the group was hampering the ability of the groups to engage residents of Arlen and Thornton more widely (see p.128).

These observations can be linked in with those of Bridger and Luloff (2001) who have rejected the assumption that the accumulation of social capital will necessarily create more sustainable communities. As discussed in Chapter Five (p.112), whilst social capital is often identified as a key element of sustainability (Peters and Jackson, 2008; Pretty and Ward, 2001; Dale and Newman, 2008; Magis, 2010), Putnam (2000) and Bridger and Luloff (2001) have suggested that pockets of social capital within communities can be divisive. It can be argued that, through funding schemes such as the CCF, ‘communities-within-communities’ become increasingly internally cohesive (i.e. amass ‘bonding’ capital), and better connected to sources of power and authority (i.e. amass ‘linking’ capital), but fail to establish *local* ‘bridging’ capital, that is, the value present in the informal connections between themselves and other local entities. The CCF actively promotes connections between funded groups, for example, through a yearly ‘Gathering’ which brings representatives from all CCF groups together for a conference-style event. However, arguably due to the CCF’s inherent assumption that the groups they fund represent the geographic community within which they operate (rather than representing a new sub-community), there is a lack of support for enhancing relationships *within* the pre-existing communities. Therefore, through participation in a funding scheme such as the CCF, community groups can become increasingly alienated from the wider community.

In theory, it is often assumed that the “turn to governance” (Jessop, 2000: 11) represents a more equitable and effective form of decision-making, and therefore is more likely to deliver ambitions of sustainable development (Griffin, 2010). However, as Griffin notes, to date, there is little evidence that this is necessarily the case. A

number of authors have questioned the assumptions in the governance rhetoric, suggesting that, rather than a devolution of power to non-state actors, the majority of multi-actor partnerships retain an asymmetrical balance of power in favour of state control, so that the apparent ‘turn to governance’ has merely served to reconfigure the way in which state power is exerted (Fenwick *et al*, 2012). Further to this, Tomozeiu and Joss (2014) argue that there is significant evidence that new governance arrangements which attempt to reconcile environmental, social, and economic sustainability objectives in fact raise substantial tensions and contradictions, including the blurring of the lines of responsibility and accountability between the state, the private sector, and civil society. As Cochrane (2010) notes, “It is hard to escape concerns about the extent to which the proliferation of partnerships, organizations and groups all claiming status in particular policy areas may ultimately simply lead to confusion and inaction” (p.371).

This inescapable concern was writ large in my case studies, and supported by the findings from interviews with six additional groups, where community-led initiatives were found to occupy a slightly hazy no man’s land within the matrix of multiple private, public and third sector organisations, all ostensibly working to enable and engender a ‘low carbon Scotland’. There are no clear lines of division of responsibility at the community level, which was observed to result in duplication of efforts and competitive tensions (p.146).

Based on these observations, it can be argued that community-led initiatives such as AET and TT need to be embedded within more democratic networks of local action and decision-making. This can be understood by considering three identifiably distinct strategies of localism: managerial, representative, and community localism (Evans *et al*, 2013a).

## 8.4 Towards a better balance of localisms

The apparent ease with which outwardly ideologically-opposed political parties have adopted ‘localism’ is a consequence of its “purposefully vague and imprecise” definition (Clarke and Cochrane, 2013: 11). It is this plurality of meaning that gives ‘localism’ something of an apolitical character, able to be applied to various political projects with seemingly equal legitimacy. As a result, there is a lack of consistency regarding what

localism means in practice, with scope for differing, if not conflicting, policies to be produced under the banner of 'localism' (Hildreth, 2011).

Drawing on Hildreth's (2011) classification of localism, Evans *et al* (2013b) have defined three distinct strategies of localism. First, 'managerial localism' is understood as "the conditional devolution of delegated decision making or delivery functions from the centre to the locality, based on achieving agreed objectives" (p.402). Under this strategy, policy is still decided at the centre, but geographically-based, local, non-governmental organisations act as agents for delivering particular services on behalf of central government, according to a centrally-derived regulatory framework.

Contrastingly, in 'representative localism', "powers and responsibility for specific governance tasks are devolved directly to elected local government" (p.402). Here, democratically-elected councillors act as agents in policy-making and service delivery, with success measured on the basis of re-election. Finally, 'community localism' "involves the devolution of rights and support directly to citizens in communities to allow them to engage in decisions and action" (p.403). This strategy of localism is founded on ideas of participatory democracy, and seeks to involve citizens in decision-making much more fundamentally and thoroughly than the casting of a vote in an election every few years. The essential distinguishing feature of 'community localism' from other forms of localism is that "the emphasis is on the direct involvement of communities and not in connecting community engagement with representative leadership" (Hildreth, 2011: 709).

Evans *et al* (2013a) argue that, whilst all three forms of localism have always existed, historically, representative localism (local government), has been dominant. However, in recent years, managerial and community localism, in the form of groups such as AET and TT, have come to play a much greater role in local governance strategies. This transition to a 'new localism' can be understood as part of the broader shift from government to governance discussed in Chapter Five (p.87). It has been argued that this transition has meant that local government has become "a bystander in the effective governance of a country with other tiers of government, public agencies, partnership organizations and third sector trusts having a bigger and more substantial role" (Stoker, 2011: 28). The CCF is a prime example of the way in which central government is

facilitating the contraction of the role and responsibilities of local government in local governance, in favour of ‘participatory’ governance through community-led action.

However, as has been demonstrated by my findings, community-led initiatives cannot be relied upon to be representative of the community in which they operate. Rather, they are better understood as small, self-selecting sub-communities. Therefore, as Evans *et al* (2013a) argue, effective local governance requires a mix of localisms, and the weakening of ‘representative localism’ weakens local governance arrangements as a whole. Community-led action “has to be integrated within existing patterns of representative government and with the need for central coordination and leadership” (p.404). The strategy of a scheme, such as the CCF, which provides funding for isolated “community-led” projects, fails to recognise the importance of integrating different forms of localism. Consequently, these funding schemes do not support the establishment of effective, inclusive local governance arrangements.

## 8.5 Summary

The CCF employs ‘communities’ as the *means* by which to achieve Scottish Government carbon emissions reduction targets, with an implicit assumption that the community will naturally be empowered and strengthened by its involvement in the project, producing stronger communities as a policy *end*. However, in order to make ‘community’ operational within policy, the CCF simplifies the slippery and subjective concept of ‘community’ into a place-based, bounded unit, represented by self-formed local community groups. The observations presented in this thesis support a large body of literature which problematizes the notion of ‘the community’ as a spatial unit through which to govern, aligning most notably with Rose’s (1996) concept of ‘government through community’.

I have demonstrated that, rather than being representative of the geographic community, AET and TT, are themselves sub-communities with a particular identity. This has been seen to have negative implications for local engagement with the groups. For example, the tendency – for various identified reasons – for involvement in the groups to be dominated by those considered to be ‘incomers’ was observed to actively deter participation from some individuals who strongly associated with a ‘local’ identity.

Therefore, whilst community-led groups such as AET and TT are drawing on members of geographically-defined communities as the means by which carbon emissions are being delivered, implying that these groups represent each community hides the fact that the actual, active participation of individuals from each community is low.

Assuming that the overarching aim of employing communities in a government-led carbon reduction initiative, such as the CCF, is to widen the uptake of more sustainable lifestyles beyond those who are already engaged, the current strategy may not be a particularly effective approach. The groups were found to be comprised almost entirely of ‘the usual suspects’, namely, middle-class, well-educated, ‘incomers’.

Further to this, and arguably more significant, is the fact that the ‘communities’ that are being strengthened and empowered by community-led initiatives (the *ends* of the policy) were not the same as the geographic communities which were being used to deliver the carbon reductions (the *means* of the policy). The CCF funnels resources into specific, self-formed ‘community’ groups, which are deemed to represent the wider community. However, due to the aforementioned inaccuracy of this assumption, the effect of this selective support is to create isolated pockets of social capital within the groups themselves, rather than throughout the geographic community. This contradicts the assumption that, by investing in community groups, the CCF will necessarily help to build mutually beneficial relationships throughout ‘the community’. Instead, it has been found that funding can exacerbate local divisions and inequalities.

My findings and analysis support the suggestion of Rowe and Robbins (2000) that it is romantic and naïve to expect an initiative to be truly led by ‘the community’. There must, therefore, be a need for a more accurate reframing of what it is that is hoped to be achieved by projects that label themselves ‘community-led’. Grassroots initiatives can have an extremely valuable role in society. When free to respond organically to the evolving needs of the local population, they can fill niche roles in the provision of goods and services. However, self-formed ‘community’ groups cannot be relied upon to deliver an inclusive form of local governance single-handedly. They must be integrated into a local system of representative institutions and local service providers which have the authority and resources to act on the needs and desires of all sectors of society.

## 9 Reflections and conclusions

*Reflection must be reserved for solitary hours; whenever she was alone, she gave way to it as the greatest relief; and not a day went by without a solitary walk, in which she might indulge in all the delight of unpleasant recollections.*

Jane Austen (1813/2014: 245)

This research did not set out to be a community study *per se*. Initially, perhaps naively, the fact that observations were taking place in ‘communities’ was considered to be somewhat incidental; community initiatives served a means of access to individuals actively pursuing more sustainable lifestyles in remote rural Scotland. The founding rationale for my research stemmed, not from a desire to chart the idiosyncrasies of any particular community, but from an awareness of the widespread recognition of the critical influence that socioeconomic context has on individual pro-environmental behaviour choices (e.g. Stern, 2000; Blake, 2001; Burningham and O’Brien, 2003; Clark *et al*, 2003; Lorenzoni *et al*, 2007; Steg and Vlek, 2009; Marquart-Pyatt, 2012) and the observed lack of research which has considered the influence of a remote rural location on the uptake of more sustainable lifestyles.

Consequently, my research began with the following broad aim:

*To better understand how community-led initiatives are encouraging a transition towards more sustainable lifestyles within remote rural communities in Scotland*

As is the nature of research which employs an ‘emergent methodology’, once in the field, observations led to adjustments in the lens of inquiry so that, rather than being incidental, ‘community’ became a central theme of the investigation.

As explained in the introduction to this thesis (p.7), the rationale behind taking a ‘general inductive approach’ was to allow the direction of the investigation to be led by observations in the field. Consequently, the following three research questions emerged as my inquiry and analysis progressed:



- 1) *How is the concept of 'community' manifested within 'community-led' initiatives attempting to encourage more sustainable lifestyles in remote rural Scotland?*
- 2) *How are 'incomer' and 'local' identities reflected within community-led initiatives attempting to encourage more sustainable lifestyles in remote rural Scotland?*
- 3) *What influence do top-down grant funding schemes have on community-led initiatives attempting to encourage more sustainable lifestyles in remote rural Scotland?*

Overall, this thesis concludes that isolated, government-funded, community-led projects will not necessarily be of net benefit – environmentally, socially, or economically – throughout the communities the projects purport to represent. This conclusion clearly has significant implications for policy, as it questions the validity of the fundamental rationale that financial support for community groups is an effective way of encouraging more sustainable lifestyles in the community as a whole.

In this, the final chapter, I outline the theoretical and policy implications of my research, identifying how I have addressed each of the three research questions, and clarifying the wider significance of my findings and analysis. I also provide some reflections on my chosen ethnographic methodology, considering the benefits as well as the limitations of this approach. I conclude by suggesting how the lessons learnt from this research could be developed and progressed by further work.

## 9.1 Academic contribution

In response to my first research question, I have presented findings and analysis which led to the conclusion that 'community' is perceived to be both the 'means' by which community-led initiatives achieve sustainability ambitions, and an ambition, or 'end', of the initiatives in itself. However, in both my case studies, only a small proportion of the local residents were actively engaged with the projects. Therefore, while the geographic community could legitimately be identified as the 'means' by which the project objectives are being achieved, this did not align with the smaller 'community' that is being strengthened as an 'end' of that project. Drawing these observations together with the existing literature on social capital (Bridger and Luloff, 2001; Putnam, 2000), I argued that, in these cases, the CCF is creating potentially divisive pockets of social capital within geographic communities. As the bonds between the group members

strengthen, and the group's relationship with positions of authority are enhanced, there is a risk that those not in the group are inadvertently excluded. Therefore, through a novel analysis of the role of 'the community' as the 'ends' and the 'means' of sustainability policy, I have provided evidence that these two roles – often assumed to be complementary – can, in practice, be contradictory.

In this thesis I have also provided evidence which demonstrates that the two community groups studied were dominated by those identified as 'incomers' and that this was reflected in the identity of the groups as a whole. Addressing my second research question, I argued that the classification of AET and TT as 'incomer' groups may lead residents of Arlen and Thornton who strongly associate with a 'local' social identity to actively avoid norms and behaviours associated with the groups, in order to enforce their own identity as a 'local'. I therefore argued that, in remote rural communities, there is a risk that community-led initiatives can take on an 'incomer' identity which may deepen existing segmentation of the community and serve to deter, rather than encourage, wider community participation. By linking the previously identified tendency for community-led sustainability initiatives to disproportionately attract the 'civic core' (Mohan, 2011; Aiken, 2012) to the observed dominance of the 'incomer' in my two case studies, I have furthered understanding of the ways in which 'community-led' initiatives can unevenly engage, and subsequently segment, remote rural communities.

The challenge of engaging with the geographic community more widely was observed to be exacerbated in several ways by the receipt of government funding. Therefore, my third and final research question was answered by evidence which suggested that the stipulations and restrictions of grant funding are at odds with the purpose and nature of grassroots action. Instead of empowering 'the community', many funding bodies were found to impose constraints on the way in which groups can operate, and even necessitate a degree of detachment between the groups and the community they have been set up to engage. As such, I have provided empirical evidence to support the counterintuitive argument that the receipt of grant funding can have substantial negative implications for community participation in 'community-led' sustainability initiatives.

In sum, I have argued that, if 'community-led' groups are in fact led by a 'social elite' who, through the need to comply with funding restrictions, must align their objectives

with those of government, these groups, and the projects they progress, can be seen as a form of ‘top-down’ development at a smaller scale. This observation links with those of previous authors, who have argued that the political motivation behind the promotion of ‘community’ is not necessarily based entirely in the rationale of sustainable development. Drawing on this body literature, I argued that, as opposed to empowering communities, the CCF is objectifying ‘the community’ as a means of governing (Rose, 2000a).

In addition to these empirical and theoretical contributions to the existing understanding of community-led sustainability action, this thesis is a rare example of research which has attempted to blend an ethnographic approach with an explicit policy focus. Whilst the local enactment of government policies is often the subject of investigation, it is unusual for research to be conducted via extended periods of participant observation. As such, this thesis contributes to the call for more qualitative research into the practicalities of contemporary governance strategies (Fenwick *et al*, 2012), and research deepens the existing body of self-reported evidence on community-led sustainability initiatives (e.g. Steiner and Markantoni, 2014; Bolger and Allen, 2013; McIntyre and McKee, 2012; Matthews and Pratt, 2012; Middlemiss, 2011a, 2011b ) by providing a first-hand account of the micro-scale interactions which affect the way in which policy is interpreted in practice.

In light of these findings, the following section reflects on how the role of ‘community’ within sustainability policy could be reframed to better serve local and national objectives.

## 9.2 Policy implications and opportunities

The CCF employs ‘communities’ as the means by which to achieve Scottish Government carbon emissions reduction targets, with an implicit assumption that the community will naturally be empowered and strengthened by its involvement in the project, producing stronger communities as a policy end. However, my findings have demonstrated that the way in which community-led activity is conceived, supported and evaluated by policymakers and funders can have a significant impact on the efficacy of this strategy.

Through schemes such as the CCF, ‘community-led’ groups become the voice of, and conduit to, ‘the community’. However, as the findings from my case studies and interviews have revealed, these small, self-selecting, agenda-driven groups are not necessarily representative of the geographic community in which they operate. Assuming the overarching aim of employing communities in a government-led carbon reduction initiative, such as the CCF, is to widen the uptake of more sustainable lifestyles beyond those who are already engaged, the observation that primarily only the ‘usual suspects’ were engaged in the two case study groups suggests that it may not be a particularly effective approach.

This is not to suggest that the government should not be supporting community-level climate change action. Bottom-up, community-based initiatives have an extremely valuable role in sustainability policy, but to view the community sector solely as a channel through which to deliver projects which produce measurable contributions to pre-defined national government objectives is to drastically undervalue this role.

### *9.2.1 Funding projects with a long-term perspective.*

As discussed in depth in Chapter Seven, my findings revealed how the need for quantifiable, pre-defined, time-limited outputs, particularly CO<sub>2</sub>e reductions, directed the activities of community-led initiatives towards short-term projects focused on physical interventions and simple behaviour changes. These activities can deliver tangible, calculable contributions to wider climate change targets, however, they do not necessarily fully exploit the unique role that community-led action can play in altering local social norms and values (see p.149). For these initiatives to have a significant influence on local lifestyles, as opposed to isolated behaviours of certain individuals, projects need to be a small part of a much longer-term sustainability narrative. As such, the framework by which community-led action is assessed and evaluated must reflect this long-term agenda.

Since I conducted my fieldwork, the CCF has gone some way to addressing these concerns. In 2012, the scheme underwent a ‘refresh’, which included revising the previous requirement for measurable CO<sub>2</sub>e reductions within the lifetime of the funding, to now asking for estimated emissions reductions over the expected lifetime of the intervention delivered through the project. This amendment, which acknowledges the need to prioritise long-term, sustainable change over short-term gains, is very much

supported by my findings. However, this revision does not tackle the conflict that was observed to exist between meeting the considerable administration, management, and evaluation requirements that accompany grant funding and remaining closely embedded within, and responsive to, the needs of the local community.

### *9.2.2 Enabling community projects to focus on the community.*

Previous research has suggested that, when free to respond organically to the evolving needs of the local population, community-led initiatives can be an effective means by which to engage and mobilise individuals around climate change issues and serve local needs (Peters and Jackson, 2008; Middlemiss and Parrish, 2010; Peters *et al*, 2010; Mulugetta *et al*, 2010). However, in this thesis, I have discussed the unexpected negative consequences of the way in which the impact and success of community-led projects is measured by funders. My analysis has demonstrated how the aforementioned expectations from funders for community organisations to take a well-planned and strategic approach, and the need to regularly report outputs, can lead to the group becoming increasingly absorbed with meeting administration and management demands, leaving less time to listen and react to the needs and wants of the communities they serve.

Unfortunately, I cannot offer a simple, immediately implementable solution here. Further research is needed to devise – or to ascertain whether it is possible to devise – more appropriate measures of success for community-led initiatives, which provide the evidence of positive impact required by policymakers and funders whilst allowing communities the freedom to experiment, innovate, and adapt over time in response to changing local conditions (Durrant, 2014). However, one potential opportunity that has been highlighted by White and Stirling (2013) is the valuable role that ‘intermediary organisations’ can play in facilitating community-led initiatives to stay closely connected to the community. The authors demonstrate how intermediaries can act as a mediator and coordinator that is one-step removed from the communities themselves, which allows them to link together, and learn from, multiple grassroots projects, and give guidance and support to new initiatives. Intermediary organisations were also found to remove some of the bureaucratic pressures and output expectations from these small, volunteer-led projects, and allow them to remain closely tied into the multiple and evolving needs and wants of the communities they serve.

This evidence serves to underline the importance of seeing community-led sustainability activities, not as a series of isolated projects, but as components of wider, multi-actor networks and complex systems.

### *9.2.3 Community-led action as part of a diverse local governance system.*

The call for better networks of governance is not new. Since the years of the New Labour government, partnership arrangements and shared responsibilities have been an increasingly popular mechanism for policy delivery. However, to date, there is little evidence to suggest that these new arrangements have actually led to a transfer of power to non-state actors (see p.177). The constant competition for top-down grants for isolated community-led projects that has been observed in this research is unlikely to be conducive to effective local development. If local empowerment is a genuine government objective, as opposed to a populist platitude, policymaking needs to holistically address, and support, all forms of localism. Instead of treating ‘the community’ as another delivery partner, community-led action must be appreciated for, and enabled to perform, the unique role it can play in society, namely, as the arena in which highly-localised, experimental, and innovative approaches to sustainable development can be pursued.

There is some evidence that the Scottish Government has ambitions towards these ends. In 2011, the ‘Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services’ (the ‘Christie Commission’) published its recommendations for “radical change in the design and delivery of public services” (Christie, 2011: viii). A central element of the reform programme is the need to extend and deepen the relationships between national and local government, and between local government and communities, including the need to improve working arrangements at more local levels than the local authority area. Delivering these reforms could be a significant move towards building the stronger local governance structures that are needed. However, as a 2013 review by the Local Government and Regeneration Committee starkly stated, “the speed, scale and nature of the response to the Christie Commission is not adequate” (Scottish Parliament, 2013: 5). Consequently, there is still significant work to be done to achieve the opportunities for local governance that the Commission highlighted.

The pressing need for local governance reforms have recently been further underlined by the introduction of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill. This proposed

legislation seeks to accelerate and embed the calls of the Christie Commission to give individuals and communities greater power over local decision making. Echoing the message of this thesis, whilst the overall intention of this legislation is widely welcomed, concerns have also been voiced that the Bill, in its current form, risks further empowering individuals who are already empowered by “only strengthening the reach and influence of articulate and organised groups and individuals” (Scottish Parliament, 2015). As such, it is important that the Bill develops to include specific provisions for improving the ways in which community capacity, cohesion, and confidence is built, rather than assuming that these will organically materialise in response to the provision of greater incentives for bottom-up development.

When reflecting on the conclusions of this thesis, it is important to note that the design of this research, and the findings it has generated, are, of course, not without limitations. In the following section, I reflect upon my methodology and the restrictions that my chosen approach places on any generalisations drawn from its findings.

### 9.3 Reflections on a method

I invested a lot of time at the beginning of this PhD in contemplating possible methodologies and, as discussed in depth in Chapter Four, concluded that an ethnographic, case study approach, drawing on literature from multiple academic disciplines, was the most fitting to reach my research aim. In this section, I reflect on how this approach has influenced my findings and conclusions.

#### *9.3.1 Cross-disciplinarity*

The fundamental rationale of ‘sustainable development’ is that economic, social, and environmental phenomena are interconnected and interdependent elements of a holistic system, which requires solutions based on cross-disciplinary, systems-based, as opposed to reductionist, knowledge (Russell *et al*, 2008). I sought to take heed of this reasoning in the design of this PhD research, not adhering to the conventions of any particular academic discipline, but, instead, employing and integrating the methodologies and literatures that I believed were most useful in gaining a better understanding of the reality of encouraging sustainable living through community-led initiatives in remote rural Scotland.

To work outside of an academic discipline is, in itself, a somewhat contentious approach. By rooting one's study in a well-established discipline, a researcher is able to stand sure-footedly on the shoulders of a host of previous scholars, enabling them to delve deeply into the ongoing intellectual challenges of that discipline (Benson, 1982). It can be argued, therefore, that the cross-disciplinary researcher sacrifices depth for breadth, as there will be few, if any, shoulders upon which to stand. Linked to this, it can be argued that the boundaries of a discipline provide the necessary limit on the breadth of an inquiry for a researcher to achieve mastery of a subject. A discipline provides a set of rules to follow, down to a list of favoured terms of reference and preferred writing style, which guides the researcher in their investigation. In contrast, the 'cross-disciplinarian' can be perceived as pursuing an unbounded and unstructured quest for all forms of knowledge, which is ultimately unmanageable and unattainable. As such, they are likely to end up a 'jack of all trades and a master of none' (Nissani, 1997; McNeill, 1999).

These criticisms are as true of this research as any 'undisciplined' work. However, as discussed in the introduction to Chapter Four, the 'real world' does not always neatly align with academic disciplines. Whilst the extension and development of well-trodden lines of inquiry is an important element of academic progress, this is not always the most fitting way in which to find solutions to the messy and complex problems that society is facing (Robinson, 2008; Law, 2004). Therefore, whilst the findings of this research may not be able to be neatly filed within any particular discipline, in combining insights from sociology, politics, geography, psychology, and anthropology, a valuable new perspective on a pressing social issue has been provided, which is of relevance both within and beyond academia.

### ***9.3.2 Case study***

The generalizability of my findings are restricted by my decision to take a qualitative, case study approach. It is well-reported that the most significant limitation of case study research is that of 'external validity' (Bryman, 2008). It is impossible to know from one or two case studies alone whether the observations are representative of situations beyond those specific cases (Gilbert, 2008).

The findings reported in this thesis are based on two in-depth case studies, and, as such, are not generalizable to other cases. Recognition of this partly spurred my decision to



complete interviews with six additional rural community groups, the findings from which supported many of the observations I had made in Arlen and Thornton.

However, as has been extensively discussed in this thesis, communities are unique and disorderly assemblages of social relations and, therefore, I would not begin to claim that the particular way in which AET and TT functioned, and the groups' relationship with the wider population, are likely to be replicated in other communities.

It was never the purpose of this investigation to discover 'the truth' about community-led sustainability initiatives in remote rural Scotland. As explained in Chapter Four, this research is based on a perception that social phenomena are inextricably linked to the context within which they occur. Therefore, the search for universal, predictive theories is thought fruitless, as this approach disregards the uniqueness of societies. Instead, the findings presented in this thesis serve as an 'exemplifying case' (Bryman, 2008) which has allowed me to examine the micro-scale social processes surrounding community-led action in remote rural Scotland. From my observations, I have been able to theorise on the ways in which local-level socio-political dynamics can affect the efficacy of government-funded community groups to encourage more sustainable lifestyles locally.

### ***9.3.3 Participant observation***

Before I began this PhD, I had no experience of ethnographic research and, looking back, it has somehow simultaneously been the easiest and the most torturous methodology I have ever employed. In what follows, I reflect upon my fieldwork with the intention of highlighting the ways in which my experience is likely to have influenced the findings and analysis that transpired.

From the outside, participant-observation can appear to be little more than an extended period of people-watching:

*"The participant observer gathers data by participating in the daily life of the group or organization he studies. He watches the people he is studying to see what situations they ordinarily meet and how they behave in them. He enters into conversation with some or all of the participants in these situations and discovers their interpretations of the events he has observed."*

Becker (1958: 652)

A seemingly simple and straightforward approach to fieldwork, participant observation is free from the artificial arrangements of survey questions and interview schedules and, as such, is endorsed as a way for a researcher to gain a deeper understanding of a social situation starkly different from their own (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). I did not have to learn any technical skills, or master a new piece of equipment. My only tools were a notebook and pen, and all I needed to do was to watch and listen to what was happening around me. And yet, from beginning to end, I experienced ceaseless waves of anxiety, doubt, and guilt over my chosen approach, which made the process far from simple or straightforward.

**9.3.3.1 Blending in.** Undertaking ethnographic research requires the researcher to surrender the habits and routines of their current everyday life temporarily, and immerse themselves in a new way of living, as John Van Maanen (2011) explains:

*“In the field, one must cut their life down (to the bone perhaps). In many respects, fieldworkers must remove themselves from their usual routines, havens, pleasures, familiar haunts, and social contexts such that the fieldwork site provides a social world. And to get at this world, one has to need it. This is not easy...”*

Van Maanen (2011: 220)

The fact that my fieldwork took place in remote rural communities undoubtedly added to the feelings of isolation and dislocation that are recognised to be a necessary component of participant observation. For both my fieldwork periods, I lived alone in a rural village, hours from my Edinburgh home, and where I knew nobody. Although I was prepared for the challenge, at times it was an intimidating and very lonely experience. Throughout my research journal there are entries which demonstrate feelings of unease and discomfort at the situation, for example, my feelings of being overwhelmed on my first day at TT:

*9.30am: First day in office. Expected to start immediately with list of tasks Hugh had emailed me a few days ago. Hugh asked if I had thought about it already. I hadn't even read the list properly! He wants me to start phoning cash and carry places in Edinburgh and Glasgow but I'm not sure what about!! Feel out of my depth!*

Research Diary, Thornton

Having read a lot of literature on ethnography and participant-observation before starting my fieldwork, I was aware of a number of community researchers that have reported sensitivity within the community in question to being studied:

*“Once [the community members] were made known of my research role, they started to view me differently, treating me as a suspicious outsider who should not be entrusted ... This perception and suspicion immediately created a more awkward social space between me and them, the researcher and the researched.”*

Li (2008: 107)

I experienced this on my second day of fieldwork in Arlen. I went on a walk around the area I was staying in, and encountered three crofters herding their cows down the road between fields:

*...The crofter then asked me if I was on holiday...I told him I was doing research about how people live on the islands and he replied, in a pointed way, “Oh well, that’ll be interesting!” then went away with his cows, speaking to a man that was with him in Gaelic. I carried on with my walk [heading in the opposite direction] and a few minutes later he pulled up beside me on a quad bike. He asked a few more questions about my research, including who I was reporting back to ... He said [about living on the islands]... on a good day you wouldn’t change anything – the islands have no crime; you can leave your door unlocked. He said any “bad eggs” are soon found out and everyone is made aware of them! I’m probably being paranoid but it felt a bit like a warning when he said that. He asked my name and told me his and said he would see me again soon. He seemed very friendly but also a little suspicious – I wasn’t sure why he was asking me who I was reporting back to...*

Research Diary, Arlen

I was extremely keen to blend in to the communities as quickly as possible and I felt acutely aware – and even embarrassed – of my Englishness. This mindfulness of my position as an ‘incomer’ to the community, and my desire not to stand out, is likely to have made me more tuned in to the relative status of others, and, consequently, may have been part of the reason that the existence of the incomer-local divide was so evident and interesting to me. However, the fact that both the groups were so heavily populated by ‘incomers’ arguably played to my advantage in terms of participant-observation within the groups themselves, as it meant that I could blend in more easily with the existing team.

**9.3.3.2 Validity.** The means of verifying findings of research conducted within an interpretivist paradigm using qualitative methods are, unsurprisingly, not as standardised

as with a quantitative approach. As Guba and Lincoln (1994: 108) acknowledge of their social constructivist assertions, "...the reader cannot be compelled to accept our analyses, or our arguments, on the basis of incontestable logic or indisputable evidence; we can only hope to be persuasive and to demonstrate the utility of our position". Similarly, Mitchell Duneier (2001) fully accepts that, as with all participant-observations, the conclusions from his five-year ethnography of Greenwich Village, New York are inescapably subjective. Whilst he believes he built up relationships and rapport based on a level of trust, and therefore that the data accurately represents the society under investigation, he recognises that the degree to which this is the case cannot ever be known for sure.

An undercurrent of doubt about the ethnographer's data collection and analysis is largely inevitable (Taylor, 2002). There will always be an opportunity for the way in which the ethnographer represents the social situation to be criticised and contested, sometimes by the research subjects themselves. Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2000) describes the extent to which this can occur in her account of the reaction to her findings from a year spent living with the rural Irish community of Ballybran. 'Ire in Ireland' explains how, despite being applauded by contemporaries in the field of anthropology, the conclusions drawn by Scheper-Hughes regarding the high rate of schizophrenia and hospitalized mental illnesses in Ireland were met with a wave of disapproval from Irish and Irish-American critics. Viewed by the native population as 'anti-Irish' and 'anti-Catholic', Scheper-Hughes was criticised for focusing only on negative aspects of the local culture, and for not giving the community credit for the things in which it flourished. In addition, the publication was met with anger that trust had been violated and community secrets exposed.

This example underlines the ethnographer's responsibility to balance the desire to delve deeply into particular details of community life in search of defining values and attitudes, with a moral obligation and a level of respect for the people whose lives are being scrutinized. In maintaining this balance, the ethnographer is likely to be subjected to the dynamics of transference and counter-transference whereby the attitudes, beliefs and values of the subjects of the research influence the researcher's own perception, and vice versa. This type of inevitable, and often undetectable, interaction is likely to modify

both the data that is collected and the way in which the data is subsequently analysed (Devereux, 1967).

Although I was aware that I was supposed to be maintaining the somewhat detached position between insider and outsider, I relished any indication or recognition that I was merging into the community, as the following extract indicates:

*He [Callum] said I must've wondered what I was doing coming up here to live. I said I was actually quite scared before I came.... He said that I had fitted in with things very easily and that not everyone would have done but that I obviously was very good at it. I'm absolutely chuffed.*

Research Diary, Arlen

Feeling isolated and alone, I had an overwhelming desire to be accepted and liked, and I was drawn to the people who I felt comfortable around and who treated me as a friend. Certain people took an active interest in me as a new addition, and went out of their way to show me around, introduce me to different people, and involve me in their lives. This is highly likely to have affected my findings, as I spent much more time with certain individuals and, therefore, had a chance to learn more about their opinions and behaviours than other people. I also found that certain people were much more interested in my research and were more forthcoming with their views on particular topics. I sought to counterbalance this by requesting interviews with people who I thought may hold interesting perspectives so that I could ask individuals particular questions one-on-one. However, it was not possible to interview everybody, and, as explained in Chapter Four (p.79), I found conducting interviews in Thornton particularly difficult. Therefore, my findings inevitably more strongly reflect the perspectives of those who readily expressed their opinions.

There was also evidence that some information may well have been actively hidden from me due to a desire for the group to represent a favourable image of themselves, as the following extract demonstrates:

*...Hugh then told me about what happened at the bustings. He said he didn't think he would tell me about it originally because it is like dirty washing, but realised that I was bound to find out anyway...*

Research Diary, Thornton

Hugh's acceptance that I was "bound to find out anyway" perhaps highlights the benefit of an ethnographic approach. Whilst Hugh did not particularly want me to know about an event that reflected badly on the group, because I was going to be living locally for the next few weeks, it would be difficult for him to hide it, and so he told me about it. If I had simply conducted an interview with Hugh, he perhaps wouldn't have divulged this information. However, it also demonstrates that the people I met were likely to be conscious of what they did or didn't say around me, and that, whilst participant-observation is more likely to reveal a deeper understanding of social phenomena than, for example, interviews or surveys, it does not necessarily reveal the entire picture. This is particularly the case for my fieldwork which was limited to two-month research periods, which is much shorter than a traditional ethnographic study.

My decision to limit my field stays to two months was based on weighing up the additional gains of a longer period of participant-observation against the financial and temporal costs. As was made clear in Chapter Four, this research was not meant to be an anthropologist's ethnography, and I absolutely cannot claim to have gained a comprehensive understanding of the social organisation of either Arlen or Thornton. However, I have provided a view from inside two community-led organisations. Exposed to the inner workings of the groups, I learnt things that I would have unlikely found out through conventional interviews. I firmly believe that the relationships I built up with group members allowed me to delve much more deeply into the socio-political intricacies of community-level sustainability action.

It is important to stress, however, that my own knowledge, interests, past experiences, and prejudices are, of course, reflected in my research. My findings are the product of my own personal interpretation of what I saw during my fieldwork stays. Another researcher is highly likely to have focussed on different aspects of the groups' activity and to have interpreted certain situations differently. I did return to Arlen a year after my fieldwork, during which time I discussed my observations and analysis with two members of staff and the Chairman of AET, and all appeared comfortable about my assessment of the situation. I tried to do the same with TT, but by this time, the management and Chairman of TT had both changed and it therefore was not possible to discuss my findings with the people who were in charge at the time.

**9.3.3.3 Insider–outsider.** Despite the fact that I believe I established some very good relationships with members of my case study communities, there was always an undercurrent of guilt on my part, knowing that I was, ultimately, using my position and my relationships to gather data. Whilst this was pushed to the back of my mind most of the time, at times it led me to question the way in which I was interacting with the group, as the following extract from Arlen demonstrates:

*I came back to the office and was looking at the map with Callum talking about it [the footpath project] when Gus twigged we were talking about the path and asked what was happening. So Callum gave him the update. Gus then asked if Callum and I were going to do the application [which Gus was originally meant to be doing]. I felt terrible and guilty and sort of ummed and erred because I suddenly realised how annoyed I would be if I was in his shoes – I have come in and interfered in his project to the point where he is being pushed out. It's definitely awkward with him now. I don't know what to do... [I was in the kitchen and] Gus came in to make a cup of tea. He didn't look at me or speak to me. It felt tense. I'm starting to feel the difficulty of my position – I want to help and I'm starting to get very interested in some of the projects – but I'm not actually part of the team and I shouldn't be interfering in the work that they are doing. I need to back off.*

Research Diary, Arlen

This experience is a classic example of the difficulty of striking the right balance between participant and observer. As I became increasingly integrated into the groups, I started to get more interested and more confident in asserting my opinions on various projects and strategies, and it was easy to get carried away, and forget that I was not actually part of the permanent team. Although it was important for me to be involved in the work of the group, this was not an 'action research' project, and, as such, I did not want to be seen to be taking over any aspect of the group's work. As the previous extract demonstrates, I was wary that I did not want to cause resentment by being seen as trying to push my way in.

It became apparent that my undercurrent of guilt about my insider-outsider position was reflected in the community members as an undercurrent of wariness and suspicion about what it was I was actually doing there. Callum was one of the people I became particularly good friends with in Arlen, so it came as a bit of a surprise to me when, a few weeks into my stay, the following interaction happened, which highlighted that, day-to-day, he did not really consider the fact that I was there to observe and examine AET:

*Callum came in at lunchtime. He had waited at home all morning for the people to come in and interview him [about crofting for a Gaelic television programme]. They were running late and when they finally turned up he ran through the list of points he had made about what he was planning to say and they told him it was too negative for the programme so didn't interview him. He showed me the list and then screwed it up and threw it in the bin. He was clearly pretty disappointed. I asked if I could see the list, so he got it out of the bin where he'd just thrown it away. He asked me jokingly if I was a spy. I said that actually yes, I suppose in a way I was, that's why I was there. He looked a bit confused and then said as long as I wasn't spying on him it was OK. I said that I was. He asked jokingly if I was from the Inland Revenue and we both laughed. I don't know whether he really understands what I'm doing here.*

Research Diary, Arlen

This exchange with Callum, somebody I had got to know quite well, made me more conscious of the fact that, even though the members of the community groups were fully aware of the purpose of my research and the fact that I was undertaking participant observation, they probably didn't think about what it meant, in terms of me noting down things they were saying and doing. A similar incident happened towards the end of my fieldwork stay in Thornton, with Lizzy, a core member of the TT team with whom I had worked almost every day:

*She [Lizzy] asked whether I was writing up now because she thought it would be an ideal opportunity to get stuff done [while it was quiet in the office]. I said kind of, that I was just writing notes and that a lot of that will probably make up my thesis but I will need to analyse it when I'm back. She asked what I was writing. I said 'everything', and gave a made up example of what I could have written from the conversation that had just happened: "Bob and Lizzy are in the office. They are discussing where Hugh is this morning" and, I said, when I had all my notes, I would go through and code them, so, in that example, I might code it as 'organisation' or something... She said she was a bit freaked out and asked whether I was going to write that she thought that The Carrot Kids [one of TT's minor side-line projects] was a silly idea. I laughed and said of course not. She turned to Bob and said, "She's writing down that it's me and you in the office and that we don't know where Hugh is!". I quickly tried to backtrack and said that that was a silly example as I wouldn't be interested in that... I said that I was looking for general themes and I wasn't even planning on identifying the groups by name... She seemed reassured by the end of the conversation, but it made me feel kind of bad, like I was being a two-faced or something.*

Research Diary, Thornton

Incidents like these highlighted the fact that, although the groups had agreed to me being there, most people are reluctant for their lives to be scrutinized, and their words



and actions recorded. I have sought to address this by anonymising everyone and everywhere mentioned in this thesis, with the hope that no opinions or actions can be traced back to any particular individuals. However, part of me will forever feel a slight sense of unease about exposing and scrutinising the day-to-day lives of people who came to be friends.

#### **9.4 Avenues for future research**

As discussed above (p.187), further research which investigates possible alternatives to the current mechanisms by which community-led sustainability activities are supported and evaluated would be extremely valuable. This is particularly pertinent as the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill undergoes consideration and amendment. A better understanding of the most appropriate ways of enabling and evaluating community action is crucial to maximising the potential of this new legislation.

As with all case study research, it would be valuable to replicate this study in other remote rural communities and compare whether the findings are consistent with those reported here. Having taken an inductive approach informed by grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), I have generated theories of social life based on direct observations of the particular situation in Arlen and Thornton. Therefore, it would be interesting to take these theories and apply a deductive methodology to test whether there is evidence to support these hypotheses elsewhere.

Similarly, as this research is focused on remote rural Scotland, it would be interesting to complete the same research in accessible rural, and urban, communities and compare the findings. This would be particularly interesting in terms of the manifestation of ‘community’ as there are likely to be significant differences in the way in which community-led initiatives are perceived and received in these contexts. For example, I would hypothesise that identities such as ‘incomer’ and ‘local’ are likely to be much less relevant in larger, more diverse towns and cities.

Linked to this, it would also be valuable to investigate further the role that the ‘incomer’ and ‘local’ identities have on community cohesion and participation within remote rural communities. My findings have suggested that, at the local level, these identities can interact with social norms, and therefore, with lifestyle choices, but there is very little up-to-date research which further explores the influence of these identities.

Finally, there is a pressing need for more comprehensive research into the way in which current policy to empower ‘communities’ is affecting local governance systems.

Evaluations of schemes like the CCF tend to be limited to assessing outputs on a project-by-project basis. However, of much greater importance than these, inevitably minor, project-level achievements, is gaining a better understanding of the impact of these policies at a systems level. That is, understanding how, and if, these projects are contributing to more sustainable ways of living.

## Postscript

Since completing my fieldwork, the chairman and founder of AET has left the islands (after six years), and AET has all but collapsed, as Adrian, a former PM and Board member of AET, explains:

*AET is now in hibernation mode as I said. We ran through the last recycling and development programmes with two, then one employee (Callum) who finished in December. We closed the office in September as we could no longer afford it.*

*The big local food project was a complete disaster. I think Isla and I were already working on the Farm Shop project when you were with us? It was neat, low risk and very affordable and would have started the concept of 'local food' in a low key way which locals could slowly get used to. The funders loved it and encouraged us to go for a £100k development grant. Unfortunately their one condition was that a so called 'advisor' should come up for a couple of days to help us and she decided we needed to be a lot more ambitious with a so called 'transformation' project covering all aspects of island food...*

*We got our £100k with the promise of up to £2m in development funding for the right projects. We appointed a project manager, but as soon as we started going out into the community to consult on what to do it was immediately evident that there was no appetite for such a project at all - even a degree of antipathy in some cases, especially local crofters. So we decided to abandon the whole thing before we wasted any money. PM stood down and £97,000 returned to the funders...*

*The whole fiasco is yet another reminder of what happens when external consultants come up for a couple of days to the islands have a quick look around and think they know all the answers. I confess to being guilty of the same thinking when I first arrived - it's taken me five years and some hard lessons to start to understand how this place really works.*

Email correspondence:  
Adrian, Former AET PM/Director  
(18<sup>th</sup> March, 2014)

This recent experience with a new funding scheme resonates strongly with my findings, particularly those in Chapter Seven regarding the negative implications of grant funding. In this case, Adrian sees the involvement of the funders, and their ambitions for “transformation”, as fundamental to the failure of the project. Interesting too, are Adrian’s closing remarks, reflecting on his own change of perspectives as he, arguably, is transitioning from ‘incomer’ to ‘local’.

Within the same email, Adrian also reflects on the failure of AET's latest venture, and his impression of the impact on the sustainability of lifestyles of people living on the islands:

*It was a huge disappointment to me as I had invested a lot of personal time and effort into the Farm Shop project which had it been followed through would now be up and running and a good base for AET to establish itself properly.*

*Instead we are left with little or nothing and no sustainability agenda of any kind apart from the usual platitudes in local development plans which are absolutely meaningless. In the process the whole concept of more sustainable lifestyles has taken a good step backwards here - such a shame as we had definitely started to make people think about it - even act in some cases.*

Email correspondence:  
Adrian, Former AET PM/Director  
(18<sup>th</sup> March, 2014)

I found these final comments particularly poignant, and they strongly support the overall findings of my thesis that the current practice of funnelling large, one-off grant payments into isolated 'community-led' projects through national-level funding bodies, which, in turn largely control the direction and outcomes of the projects, is misguided and ineffective in creating more sustainable lifestyles at the local level. Whilst 'the community', namely, the residents of Arlen, has acted as the means by which low-carbon projects have been delivered, in the end, 'community' (in any sense of the word) has not been strengthened or empowered.

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## Appendix 1: Initial email to CCF groups

Dear Angus Finney,

I am currently undertaking a PhD at the University of Edinburgh entitled "Sustainable Lifestyles in Remote Rural Scotland". My project, which forms part of a UK-wide study of sustainable lifestyles, has the specific intention of addressing the urban bias in this field of research to date.

In terms of sustainable living, I think there is a huge gap in our understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities in remote rural locations, which I am seeking to correct through an in-depth investigation of two or three remote rural communities. From this I hope to get an understanding of the issues influencing everyday lifestyle choices, whether related to infrastructure, government policy, social expectations, or cultural heritage. I am particularly interested in the role of community engagement and cohesion in facilitating the move towards more sustainable living.

The work of the Carness Community Trust on the "Green Carness" project stands out as an exemplar for the kind of initiatives that are needed to transition towards more sustainable lifestyles. I would be very interested to come and visit Carness to understand how projects like this have had an impact on the community, what it means to participate in a project such as this, and how it has helped the residents live in a more environmentally sustainable way, as well to learn about the challenges that you have faced in undertaking an ambitious project such as this. I would be equally interested to learn how you are progressing now that the two year project has come to an end, whether there are new initiatives underway or not.

In the long term, I am looking to find two or three places that would be willing for me to join them for a period of two to three months, living in the community and volunteering on projects, with the ambition that this will give me a better insight into everyday sustainable living in these locations.

Carness is one of the communities that I would very much like to study and as a result I am planning to visit the area on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> and Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> of June to discover whether it would be feasible. I would be hugely grateful if you might have the time to meet with me at some point over those two days. I would love to talk to you about the work of Carness Community Trust, as well as hear your thoughts on the prospect of me conducting part of the main body of my research in Carness.

Kind regards,  
Emily Creamer

## Appendix 2: Pilot study notes

### **Site 1: Invernor, Highland (mainland)**

Dates of visit: 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> June 2011

CCF Group: Invernor Foundation

Key projects: i) Hydroelectric scheme; ii) Community allotments

Interviewee: Diana, CCF project manager

### **Interview Findings:**

The Invernor Foundation (IF) was created in 1999 to enable the community to buy the estate from the receivers (with support from other organisations, e.g. Highlands and Islands council, other NGOs, etc). This was one of the cases which encouraged the establishment of the Scottish Land Reform Act 2003 [NB: After the death of the long-standing landlord, the Estate passed through a number of hands, bought and sold solely as a financial investment with little regard for tenants or infrastructure. As a result the hydroelectric plant established by the previous landlord has become run down to the point of uselessness, buildings were in need of repair, and tenants did not feel that the Estate was being looked after, resulting in many of the local community members moving away.]

Although much of the housing is owned privately (and a number are owned as holiday homes), the majority of the present community are members of IF. There are a few who opposed the buyout and are stated to have preferred it when the Estate was managed by a private landowner as it meant they didn't have to worry about the day-to-day running of their community.

Initial priorities for IF were to be financially sustainable, and to ensure survival of Invernor as a viable community.

One of the main tasks was to repair the hydroelectric plant and make it profitable, which has been achieved. All the houses in Invernor are linked to the hydroelectric grid and therefore run off renewably-generated electricity at all times, except when the plant is undergoing maintenance.

A secondary achievement has been to dedicate an area of land to a community garden for people to use to grow their own produce. It was stated that this was a very easy thing for IF to do as they own so much empty land and therefore did not

have to purchase it/make any sacrifice to obtain it and could action it immediately. However, when asked how they were encouraging people to start growing their own food, Diana said that they were not really trying to increase participation, stating that *"you can't make people do things"*.

Related to this, Diana made the comment that *as they own so much land it is easier for them than their urban counterparts*, and therefore that maybe they did not need as much direct government assistance as other communities. However, in a brief follow-up meeting, another IF member suggested that *Estate/land ownership also had major drawbacks as the community can become overwhelmed by the amount that need to be done for day-to-day existence that sustainable behaviours are side-lined*, e.g. need to collect your firewood for you fire (as there is no gas connection), or organise your shopping order/delivery from the mainland, etc so no time to spend in the garden growing vegetables.

With regard to the question of how feasible it might be for the community to use the garden to become self sufficient in terms of food, it was stated, firstly, that self-sufficiency was not the intention of IF – there are no 'Good Life' ideals, but rather that *people are interested in "living more gently"*. [Q: How do you identify the point at which you have achieved the optimal lifestyle – When do you stop? Do you have to be entirely self-sufficient/have ZERO environmental impact in order to be classed as truly sustainable?]. In addition, *one of the biggest barriers to achieving more sustainable lifestyles is the economic dependence on tourism*. A large number of non-community members come and stay and need food, whilst it may, in theory, be possible to produce adequate food for the residents, it was thought impossible to be able to continue to cater for tourists (via the pub and the tea room) without imported food. [Q: Do tourists count as community members? Are you impacts when on holiday, e.g. the food you eat, the activities you undertake, included as impacts of your home community or impacts of the community which you are visiting?].

There is a big tension between the rural development aims of sustaining/increasing the community's income, and the desire/ability to reduce their carbon footprint further.

It was also suggested that *the impact of living in such a beautiful, environmentally pristine area leads to the perception of a great distance between the behaviours local people adopt and the impact that they have*, e.g. their waste

is collected and shipped away, they never see the landfill, equally they do not see the pollution from factories which manufacture the goods they purchase. This disconnect can serve to reduce the degree of importance placed on environmentally conscious living. As long as their own local environment is unspoilt, the regard for other areas is minimal. One example given was the recent idea to have a small quarry in Invernor to produce the stone needed for local building projects. The stone is currently shipped in via road, resulting in significant emissions and environmental damage. However, the locals rejected the idea as they did not want to mar the local landscape - "out of sight, out of mind".

The impression I got from the interview with Diana was that IF is not necessarily particularly focussed on changing individual lifestyles. IF was set up to keep the community going and build it up further, and there is no tangible link to a wider climate change agenda. *The fact that a number of their activities have environmental benefits is a bonus, rather than the objective.*

A cynical view could be that the CCF funding that IF receives provides employment for a local resident who oversees projects which IF need to do to maintain the community, but can also be branded as 'green' (e.g. running hydroelectric scheme). Also implements some relatively easy, low-cost/effort projects which tick boxes in terms of sustainable living (e.g. community garden).

## **Site 2: Carness, Island**

Dates of visit: 9th - 11th June 2011  
CCF group: Carness Development Trust  
Key Projects: i) 'Green Carness'; ii) Carness Renewables  
Interviewee: Angus, CCF project manager

### **Interview Findings:**

The island has a population of approximately 10,000 (up from 7,000 in 1971). 850 live in Carness. 450 are members of Carness Development Trust (CDT).

CDT has 2 subsidiary companies - a trading arm called Carness Community Trading Ltd, through which they have bought a local garage, petrol station and shop and run them for profit to help cover the Trust's costs, and Carness Renewables Ltd, which is a not-for-profit organisation and incorporates various projects to promote low carbon living, one of which is 'Green Carness'.



In 2008, a group of students visited Carness for 6 weeks to calculate their carbon footprint. They found it to be approximately 17tCO<sub>2</sub> per person per year. This is 5t higher than the Scottish average. The biggest problems were waste, heating and transport.

Therefore, CDT applied for, and received £99,000 from CCF for 'Clean Carness', a 2 year project March 2009 – March 2011 to try to reduce their footprint down to the national average. Over the 2 years CDT have run numerous initiatives through Clean Carness, e.g. Carrying-out home energy audits, supplying energy-saving lightbulbs and smart meters, held bike events, ran school events, etc.

The students returned this year and found that they have reduced their footprint by 5%. However, Angus recognises that a lot of this is because a kerbside recycling scheme was, coincidentally, launched by the council during the 2 year period.

Their application for continued funding in March 2011 was rejected, therefore Clean Carness is now on pause. [NB: CCF appears to favour new projects which haven't had funding before. However, Angus was unconvinced that this was the best way to achieve actual carbon savings (which is the stated aim of the CCF) as they now only provide funding for one year, which is just enough time for a project to get off the ground and set-up to make carbon savings, but then has to be shut down if funds are withdrawn, therefore not actually achieving anything. Wouldn't it be better to continue projects (such as Clean Carness) which have proven carbon savings and a clear pathway to delivering further savings?]

Carness Renewables also has a number of other projects, including a community turbine project, a wood chip business, and they have just purchased an area of forest.

Angus stated that the majority of the community were supportive of the work that CDT is doing, but that there will always be some people who do not want to change and are opposed to projects such as these.

When asked about the feasibility of conducting a longer-term ethnographic study of sustainable lifestyles in Carness, Angus pointed to the fact that Clean Carness was not currently active and so, at the moment, there is little community participation work being done and the focus is more levelled on the renewables projects.

This information gathered from the formal interview was supported by an unplanned discussion with Peter, a local hostel owner:

*Born and raised in Carness, Peter left the island at the age 16 to go to London to work in the police. He was forcibly retired in his mid-30s due to severe injury at work, moved back to the island and, now 72 years of age, has lived in Carness ever since.*

*Peter says that the local taxpayers resent the government funding "incomers" to carry out projects such as the CCF initiatives as it is a 'waste of money' which could be better spent. He and his children have had to leave the island in order to find skilled employment and so he sees it as deeply unfair that non-native people are able to come and live very comfortably in his local community using public money.*

*According to Peter, incomers are people who have no heritage in the Highlands and Islands - nicknamed "white settlers". Approximately 3,000 of 8,000 population (disagrees with Angus Robertson's estimate) are incomers. He says that the incomers and locals do mix well and that they generally are "very nice even though they are incomers". He observes that there is a certain type of person who chooses to settle on the island, notably "well-bred, well-moneyed" types. However, there is a distinct social divide between the two groups and Peter states that they will never be regarded as locals.*

*Peter believes the majority of the island's money comes from tourism and from selling areas of croft land for houses to be built. He owns a croft and one of his sons would like to come back to the island but Peter believes that crofting is no longer profitable and therefore his son is not able to return.*

### **Site 3: Arlen, Island**

Dates of visit: 12<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> June 2011  
CCF group: Arlen Eco Team  
Key projects: i) Home Energy (Insulation pilot study; Home energy audits; Low carbon-low cost heating project); ii) Renewables (Assisting with community energy project); iii) Horticulture; iv) Waste  
Interviewee: Isla, CCF project manager

## **Interview Findings:**

Arlen Eco Trust (AET) first got CCF support March 2010. They conducted an investigation into Hard to Treat (HtT) houses – ran workshops and conferences and are now feeding in to Green Deal policy, and a food-growing experiment. Both have been re-funded this year.

Their HtT 2011/12 projects are 3 fold:

- Pilot Scheme: They are using 3 buildings to investigate the various suggestions that emerged from last year's meetings. They will apply different techniques to each building and monitoring the energy levels to compare the efficiency of each. They will then run workshops to demonstrate the techniques to the local people.
- Mapping Exercise: Found that the data quality from an Energy Savings Trust home audit was poor – when some homes were retested a lot of mistakes were found. AET are therefore redoing all the houses to be sure of accuracy. The results from this will feed into Government to advise the Green Deal report. 2 people have been employed to conduct this audit. Training starts in Jul and the survey will be completed by March 2012.
- Low Carbon/Low Cost Heating: There is no gas supply to the islands and oil and electricity are both expensive and high carbon, therefore they are conducting an investigation into lower carbon, lower cost ways for people to heat their homes.

There are two strands to the renewables projects:

- They plan to build a wind turbine to generate electricity for the islands' school. AET will sell the electricity at a cheap rate, generating savings for the school and an income for AET. This will be funded by a commercial loan, not a grant, so that they are eligible for FIT.
- Some residents of Horton (small community in South Arlen) want to generate their own power. £9,500 grant has been secured for a feasibility study but the residents are still consulting on how the money should be spent – must be used by the end of the year or the grant is withdrawn.

Funding was secured for 2 greenhouses to allow one for growing trials to see what products could be grown most effectively, and one for community plots.

Waste project to encourage more residents to separate their waste into organic and non-organic so that it can be put into the anaerobic digester in the north. This includes a mapping exercise to calculate how much carbon is used in waste and to map the journey of an Arlen resident's waste, which will be turned into an educational film.

Isla says that there is a lot of emphasis on community engagement and participation across all the projects, with many events designed to include local residents and facilitate them to make changes to the way they live.

When asked about the possibility of Arlen being used as an ethnographic case study Isla was extremely positive and said that there would be a wealth of activity for me to observe and participate in, plenty of people to speak to and much, she believes, that could be learnt about the specific challenges of sustainable living in the islands.

This was the most positive interview to date – the community group is clearly very active and there are many different types of projects to explore. Throughout the interview some of the opportunities and challenges already began to emerge, such as the difficulty of ensuring that all members of the community are consulted before projects commence. Isla also mentioned how the physical isolation from the mainland sometimes seems to translate into the local council being 'out of the loop' when it comes to national schemes and funding opportunities.

However, it was also clear from the short time I spent on the islands that there is a strong level of cohesion. This was evident from simple things, such as people always stopping to talk (at length) to whomever they passed whilst walking, and the fact that the school bus will pick up people who are walking along the route for no charge.

#### **Site 4: Thornton, Southern lowlands**

**Date of visit:** 20<sup>th</sup> June 2011

**CCF group:** Focus on Thornton

**Key projects:** i) Thornton Online; ii) Veg boxes; iii) Gardens

**Interviewee:** Eileen, CCF project manager

#### **Interview Findings:**

Eileen stated that the primary focuses of 'Focus on Thornton' (FoT) are social and economic concerns rather than

environmental issues such as climate change. It is believed that environmental problems will naturally be addressed by increasing local control and self-sufficiency.

It is a generalised assumption that rural communities have a lot of access to growing land. However, in Thornton they have found it difficult to find land to use for growing fruit and vegetables to supply their box scheme, therefore their scheme sources products from existing growers.

All their CCF projects are food based - "Fun food event", seasonal foods event, forest garden, "climate friendly farming", set up a Farmer's Market, installed a wormery, food swap days, etc

Eileen stated that there was some hesitation in applying for the CCF grant as the ethos of the fund is not necessarily aligned with the ethos of their projects. She is not in favour of the demand for estimates of carbon savings as she believes that the focus should be on building the social and economic foundations to enable more sustainable living, rather than trying to achieve carbon reductions from the outset.

When asked what the biggest challenges were for her Eileen mentioned how there had been some difficulties within the group as it became clear that some people wanted to pursue a more traditional environmental approach, while some wanted to take the socioeconomic approach that Eileen advocates. As a result, an environmental splinter group formed and took over most of the projects that the group had in the development stages. Therefore, FoT had to start again and build up new projects and new ideas.

A further challenge that was identified was that of government investment. Eileen is aware of a local council budget overspend, and a general a drop in remote rural investment means that Thornton is in receipt of less government funding than in previous years. This lack of government support means that there is a need for community members to help provide services, etc, to keep the community running.

Eileen perceives there to be a high level of social activity within Thornton. She is aware of lots of community groups and clubs. She states that, due to the remote location and lack of facilities such as cinemas, etc. people have to make their own entertainment.

She also believes that there is a lot of volunteering within Thornton, perhaps due to the higher level of social cohesion

formed by higher levels of participation in community activities.

Eileen stated that there is an observable tension between the incoming population and natives, as was observed in Carness. Eileen points to income disparities as the main cause of the tension. Specifically, natives are being priced out of housing market by richer retirees who want to live in picturesque rural locations such as Thornton. Therefore, native local residents are 'trapped' in poor quality housing from which they cannot afford to move out.

Eileen stated that Thornton might not be a particularly appropriate place for an ethnographic study as it is too large to study comprehensively in a few months.

## Appendix 3: Email exchange with Bob Smith

Date: Fri, 20 Apr 2012 13:03:21 +0100  
From: [Focus on Thornton email address]  
To: [emily.creamer@ed.ac.uk](mailto:emily.creamer@ed.ac.uk)  
Subject: Dispacment in a community for political gain

Dear Emily , Firstly I would like to introduce myself my name is Bob Smith tel ; [telephone number] I have been informed that you are doing Phd at the University of Edinburgh "Sustainable Lifestyles in Remote Rural Scotland" first observation Thornton is not remote has access to...[details of location of Thornton removed for anonymity]. Was told you are based at Thriving Thornton for a few weeks are you under their wing or free to roam as there is growing tension, friction in the community on the operations by them and my belief is they are cherry picking at waste only dealing in waste with a resell value but relay heavily on funding thus give a false impression on their true worth I myself are a sole recycler been doing this before TT set up and they have and still are causing me displacement to my livelihood , and they are causing problems to other organizations that are wanting to do good in their home town .I stated in my heading "political gain" I whole heartily beleave this as the ex Chairperson for TT is standing for councillor and did state once to me she needed a platform to launch her political career from so this brings me to Scottish Government and them being very keen on studying CCF investment but you being based in the heart of it "tinted glasses view". Have been in talks with David Gunn manager of the CCF with my concerns and mentioned this to him along with the Police visiting a resident how has been asking questions to TT and yesterday he went to see if he could talk with you and was told he could speak to you in your own time and refused to let him speak to you the police told him to stay away from TT as he's been asking awkward questions . If you want to communicate [sic] that would be good but TT are aware of me and when they start doing it properly I'm happy as funding is public money and it should all be done with openness accountability and more so transparency , yours faithfully, bob

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Date: Mon, 23 Apr 2012 10:34:41 +0100  
From: [emily.creamer@ed.ac.uk](mailto:emily.creamer@ed.ac.uk)  
To: [Focus on Thornton email address]  
CC: [Eileen email address]  
Subject: Re: Dispacment in a community for political gain

Hi Bob,

Thanks for your email.

I am assuming from the information you have that Eileen passed on my details to you. Are you part of the Focus on Thornton team?

As I said to Eileen, I am very much looking for a rounded view of sustainable living in Thornton, including the work of Focus on Thornton. Therefore, I would definitely like to hear more about what the group is doing and your perceptions of the opportunities and barriers to sustainable ways of life in Thornton.

Whilst I am interested in understanding how groups with similar ambitions (such as Thriving Thornton and Focus on Thornton) operate within the same community, I do want to stress that my interest is solely on my PhD research: investigating the role of grassroots community organisations in promoting more sustainable ways of living in remote rural Scotland. I have absolutely no political persuasion and I do not want to get in the middle of a local political rivalry.

If members of Focus on Thornton have the time to meet with me to discuss the role of the organisation within the community that would be great. I am away tomorrow but will be in Thornton most days over the next 7 weeks. As I do not know you, or anything about you, I would be more comfortable if Eileen was to join us for any meeting we arrange.

With best wishes,  
Emily

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Date: Mon, 23 Apr 2012 12:55:16 +0100  
From: [Focus on Thornton email address]  
To: [emily.creamer@ed.ac.uk](mailto:emily.creamer@ed.ac.uk)  
Subject: thanks for reply

Hi Emily,

Thank you for your reply ,

I am self employed and am not a member of the Focus on Thornton , they are well aware of my situation regarding Thriving Thornton and the impact it is having in Thornton as we speak my business is on the brink of folding since Thriving Thornton got funding to do what I did for a living and I can not compete at all ,

will speak to Eileen in the next couple of days and see what she wants to do,

You seem to have arrived at the wrong time and this is not what you were expecting and I fully understand you done know me as I have a daughter at Uni and I till her to be carefull , Take care and I will contact you soon,  
Bob

## Appendix 4: Funding Questioning Framework

### Introductory questions

- o How long have you been involved with the community group/organisation?
- o What is your role in the group/organisation?
- o Did you have any prior experience of community-led projects?

### Part One – Background

1. The group
  - Group origins
  - Objectives
  - Activities
  - Future plans
  - People – paid and unpaid staff/contributors
  - Land ownership
2. Role of the community
  - Who is the community represented by the group?
  - How do you gauge the opinions/wants/needs of the community?
3. Relationship with other organisations
  - Are there other community groups working in the same locality as you?
  - Do you ever work in partnership with other local community groups or organisations, e.g. the Local Authority?

### Part two – Grant Funding

1. Funding bodies
  - Which organisations have provided the majority of your grant funding (grants over £10,000)?
  - Have you had many unsuccessful applications for funds?
  - How do you source information about funding?
  - How do you decide which funds to apply to?
2. Application process
  - Generally speaking, how would you describe your

experience of the process of applying for grant funding for your community-led initiatives?

- How does your experience of the application processes compare between various funds? e.g. Complexity of application process; Time/resources needed to complete application; Competitiveness of the fund; Level of support or guidance from the funders.
- Could the process be improved? If so, how?
- Do any funds stand out as having a particularly effective/ineffective application process?

### 3. Payment of grant

- Have you found that the process in which grant funding is paid to the group has been suitable for your needs?
- How does this process compare between funds?
- Could the process be improved? If so, how?
- Do any funds stand out as having a particularly effective/ineffective payment process?

### 4. Amount of funding available

- Have you found that the amount of funding that is available for community groups to apply for is sufficient for your needs?
- Has the amount of money available ever influenced the projects you have chosen to undertake?
- Are there any funds that stand out as having a particularly effective/ineffective policy regarding the amount of funding available?

### 5. Timescales of funding

- How well have you found that the time periods of funding provision align with the requirements of community-led activities?
- Are timescales usually suitable for the project?
- Have the timescales ever influenced the project being undertaken?
- Are there any funds that stand out as having a particularly effective/ineffective policy regarding the timescales of funding?

### 6. Monitoring and reporting

- How have you found the administration/monitoring/reporting requirements attached to grant funding?
- How does your experience of monitoring/reporting requirements compare between various funds? e.g. Complexity? Resources required? Support from funders?

- Could the process be improved? If so, how?
  - Are there any funds that stand out as having a particularly effective/ineffective policy regarding reporting requirements?
7. Other comments about grant funding
- Do you have any other comments or observations from your experience with grant funding?

### **Part three – Other sources of income**

#### **1. Revenue generation**

- Does the group have any revenue generating activities?  
If so,
- What are these activities?
- Have you always generated revenue?
- Does generating revenue influence the nature of group?

#### **2. Other sources of income**

- Does the group rely on any other sources of income that have not been mentioned?

#### **3. Non-financial support**

- Do you receive non-financial support from any other organisations, e.g. Local Authority, SCVO, HIE, CES, other local organisations, etc.
- Are there any organisations that stand out as providing particularly good support?
- Are there any areas where your group would benefit from more non-financial support?